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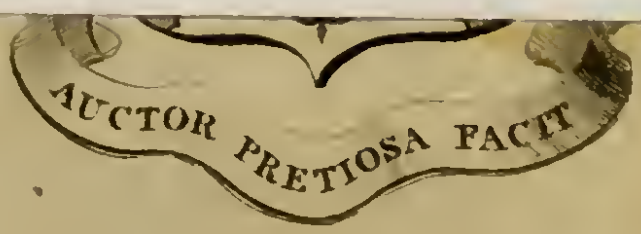

James Lenox.

MISTAKES IN RELIGION

EXPOSED,

IN AN

ESSAY ON THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS.

BY THE LATE

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CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN, AND RECTOR
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INTRODUCTION.

MISTAKES in religion pass with many for matters of small importance, because they are supposed to have little or no connexion with our present or future happiness.

The following pages directly oppose this tenet, now become extremely popular, by a winning appearance of candour and free inquiry, which its patrons never fail to plead in favour of it.

To expose, therefore, the favourite conceit, that "Men are in no danger of destruction from embracing false doctrine," is become needful, and will serve as a proper Introduction to this Essay.

Were the conceit then true, that mistakes in religion are matters of small importance, it must be true also, that a well-informed judgment would be of no more value towards obtaining acceptance with God, than one

blinded by the spirit of error. Good principles and bad must no longer influence the mind according to their nature, and, therefore, should lose their names. Ignorance would stand upon a level with knowledge, and false conceptions of God with those which are just; for no preference can be due to one above the other, if the practical influence of both be the same.

More glaring absurdities than these are, cannot be named. The notion, therefore, from which they necessarily follow, must itself be false.

But the mischief of this opinion equals its absurdity. What can pour contempt on all religion more than to suppose mistakes about it are of no consequence? Will any man study to know the mind of God, after he is persuaded ignorance in that respect has no hurtful tendency; or value the Bible, when the truths contained in it, instead of being accounted principles of life and action, are degraded into speculative points, which we may neglect without guilt, and deny without loss or danger to the soul? Or what power of commanding faith in the doctrines he hath revealed, can be said to remain with God, when authority over conscience is supposed entirely to rest on every man's own apprehension of truth, and not on the written word?

A conceit so pernicious, manifestly contradicts the judgment and practice of Christ and his apostles. They are absolute in requiring men to receive the truths they taught as necessary to salvation. "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins," saith the Lord, John viii. 24. "Preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," Mark xvi. 15, 16. The practice of the apostles was founded upon this decisive tone of their Divine Master. Hence, when certain teachers at Philippi deviated from the faith, St. Paul calls them "dogs," to excite universal detestation of their errors; and charges the church to beware of them. He commands the churches of Galatia to look upon those as "accursed" who preached any other gospel to them, than that they had heard from his mouth. And he places heresies in the same dreadful predicament with adultery, as a work of the flesh. St. Peter, perfectly harmonizing with his brother apostle, expresses himself in as strong terms on this head: "There shall be false teachers," he says, "among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction," 2 Pet. ii. 1.

St. John commands the faithful not to receive

into their houses any teacher who should bring with him any other doctrine than he had taught them himself; charging them "not to bid such a one God speed;" lest, by so doing, they should become "partakers," not of his speculative mistakes, but "of his evil deeds," 2 John 10, 11.

It is evident from these passages, a few of many which might be alleged, that Christ and his apostles were extremely jealous to preserve the doctrine they taught uncorrupted, as a matter of the last importance. No art can reconcile their declarations, warnings, and commands, to the conceit that mistakes in religion have little connexion with our present or future happiness. Nor is it possible to reverence their judgment and practice as an infallible precedent, unless we regard these declarations, warnings, and commands, as decisive, that false doctrine is poison to the soul, and to be sound in the faith, necessary to acceptance with our Maker.

The authority and practice, therefore, of Christ and his apostles, will justify every well-meant attempt to prove the malignant nature of mistakes in religion.

Every one exposed in this work is fairly deducible, I apprehend, from the prophecy of Zacharias, a part of scripture highly deserving peculiar attention; because it certainly contains that very system of divinity which the

Baptist, from his tenderest years, was taught to believe; for it is against all reason to suppose, that his father would ever instil any other doctrine into the mind of his child, than what he published to the people himself when full of the Holy Ghost.

This prophecy I call a system of divinity, because it contains several articles of religion, which, like the foundation and superstructure, bear to each other the nearest relation, and must stand or fall together.

Zacharias, for instance, teaches that we are all in the hands of our enemies, and of those that hate us. Hence, our ruin must be certain, unless some Deliverer, more mighty than our foes, undertake our rescue. In the words of the prophecy, the "Horn of salvation," raised up to visit and redeem us, must be the Lord himself. And, when our guilt and our pollutions are so great, what can inspire men, intimidated on this account, with full confidence in the Horn of salvation? Nothing less than the promise, covenant, and oath of God, that such trust shall be crowned with final conquest over every foe; or, in the words of Zacharias, that the people of God, being "delivered out of the hands of their enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of their life," Luke i. 74, 75.

Further, it follows from hence, that this plan of salvation, provided for fallen man, and displaying every perfection of God in the highest degree, well deserves to be the principal subject of all prophecy, as the knowledge of it is the appointed means of promoting holiness and peace amongst men in every age. Zacharias expressly affirms these several truths, which stand inseparably connected together. So that, without any force of interpretation, or human comment, we find the chief articles of the christian faith in these dictates of the Holy Ghost, published by the Baptist's father.

Several religious mistakes, besides those exposed in this Essay, might have been justly deduced, I am very sensible, from this distinguished part of scripture. But those selected had the preference, from long observation of the bad effects, in the course of more than twenty years' attendance on the business of my profession, first in London and its near neighbourhood, afterwards in the large and very populous parish of Huddersfield.

Regular practitioners in the medical art are allowed to have knowledge in the nature and cure of bodily diseases, from seeing much of both. Can it be just to deny to spiritual physicians the same advantage respecting diseases of the soul, when their appointment is

only to study its welfare? Strange indeed, if much thought, joined to much conversation, on the grand subject of religion, with young and old, rich and poor, ignorant and learned, devout and profane, should not give sufficient opportunity of discovering with certainty, what are the principal mistakes which defeat the end of our instructions!

Much intercourse in this way must teach all who are desirous of knowing, what mistakes some fall into by being wise in their own eyes; what soothe others of licentious life into a fatal security; what fill youthful minds with prejudice even against the Prince of peace; moralists, with contempt of him; formalists, with obstinate confidence in their blind devotions; and antinomians, with the most detestable presumption.

To create a salutary dread of such pernicious errors, is the design of this work. And very few mistakes stand here exposed, but such as all earnest christians, who ascribe their whole salvation to the grace of God, and the redemption that is in Jesus, will agree are pernicious; yet I never met with a treatise containing a formal confutation of them.

Should any person, of religious sentiments directly opposite to those maintained in this Essay, think it worth his while to remark from the press on what he may call my own gross

prejudices, it is proper he should know, that I shall gladly retract any mistake I may have fallen into, with due gratitude to my corrector, but intend no reply in vindication of my principles; because, if a book cannot defend itself to the public, it will be in vain for the author to attempt doing it. Besides, how very rare is a controversy in which either respondent or opponent keep from impertinent observations, disdainful irony, mean prevarication, and even personal abuse. So that nothing can be more disgusting to those who love peace, or more hurtful to the cause of Christ, than disputes in divinity, as they are managed almost on every occasion.

The reader of these pages, it is presumed, will not find them written in the spirit of controversy; their sole design being to prove the baneful influence of notions contrary to the doctrine believed by the universal church in every age. This, indeed, is often done with some warmth, against the mistake, not the person whom it deceives. And those who are ready to take offence at such warmth, seem to forget, that men and their principles are very different things, which ought by no means to be confounded together. Every sentiment of compassion and love is due to their persons, who even trample "under foot the Son of God," Heb. x. 29; but detesta-

tion is no less due to their errors. Were there no power of thus separating abhorrence of fatal mistakes, from ill-will towards those who hold them, then the best christians must be deemed most uncharitable, at the instant they prayed for their murderers with all the ardour a tender mother would ask the life of her child; since, at that very instant, the martyrs declared, in the most affecting manner, that the mistakes of their persecutors were absolutely fatal; because they suffered death itself, rather than give the least countenance to them.

Indeed, love to God and man requires that errors of a pernicious nature should be exposed always with warmth, both from the pulpit and press; for the more earnestly conclusive arguments are urged, the more deeply will the cause we plead be advanced. Another objection may be made to this, with all works of a serious nature: it may be said to give a melancholy picture of the state of mankind, who are living in general under the power of fatal mistakes. But has not the general state of mankind, in every age, been a most afflicting consideration to every thoughtful and benevolent christian? Can you believe there is "a God who judgeth in the earth, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on

iniquity," Psa. lviii. 11; Hab. i. 13, or that they only "who have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life," John v. 29, and see the general state of mankind in a pleasing light? Next to their own offences and depravity, nothing has ever so much imbittered this world to the greatest lovers of the human species, as seeing the headlong pursuits in which the multitude are seeking death, eternal death! What sighs, what tears in secret before God, have they not, after the example of Christ, poured out, because men are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness! What fervent intercessions have they not offered up in their behalf, who have reproached them at the same time for their uncharitableness! What hard and long struggles have they gone through, before they could cease from quarrelling with the determinations of Infinite Wisdom, out of love to their perishing fellow-creatures! How would they wish, were it lawful, which they know it is not, that every individual, whatever he has been or done here, might escape the wrath to come. On the contrary, the purity of God, the honour of his law, the end of his government, the truth of his word, the interest of his upright creatures, for ever exclude all hope of happiness from those "who love darkness rather than light;"

and, in the language of Isaiah, hold fast "a lie in their right hand," Isa. xliv. 20. And, in this case, what does good-will to men, or faithfulness to God demand from us? Surely not insinuations of impunity to the unbelieving and disobedient. No; but to alarm them, if possible, by proving, that neither numbers, nor fashion, nor presumption, can destroy the eternal connexion there is, in the nature of things, between unbelief and misery, hell and incorrigible wickedness. In no other way can effectual opposition to wide-spread immorality and error be made; because the greater necessity there is, from the prevalence of both, to insist on their final issue, doubtless, the more melancholy must the general condition of mankind appear.

Is nothing to be feared beyond the grave, let men think, speak, and act as they please? No longer, then, ascribe unto God the perfections of his nature, or profess belief of a resurrection, both of the just and the unjust. But if men can be saved only through Christ, in the way of faith and obedience, then true benevolence must be inseparable from earnest contention for christian faith and practice; must animate us openly to oppose every deviation from either, as full of danger; and engage us to join with intrepid zeal for the

doctrine and precepts of Christ, with fervent prayer to Him who openeth the eyes of the blind, and bringeth prisoners out of their prison, Isa. xlii. 7, that all who err may be led into the way of truth, and knowledge increase to make men wise unto salvation.

AN

ESSAY

ON THE

PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS.

CHAPTER I.

On the character of Zacharias.

THE spirit of prophecy, one peculiar glory of the jewish church, was entirely withdrawn for some ages before our Saviour's birth. It ceased with Malachi, who closed the canon of ancient scripture, and was not again vouchsafed for more than three hundred years. Judge, then, what a subject of discourse, surprise, and joy, it must have been among the true israelites, when it was publicly known, that God had once more raised up a prophet amongst his people: that Zacharias, a priest long distinguished for piety, and excellency of life, was become, by miracle, a parent in his old age; his wife being old also, and full of the

Holy Ghost, proclaimed the approaching appearance of the Messiah.

Such was the striking prelude, appointed to prepare the jews for the reception of Christ, who by signs and wonders from his birth, was powerfully proved to be the Lord.

Yet Zacharias, excellent as he was, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless," Luke i. 6, greatly offends on this occasion. For though assured by an angel, that he should embrace a son of his own, he could not believe the marvellous promise. His unbelief is punished upon the spot. In a moment he loses his speech, and is cut off from all sweet intercourse with his friends, till the very fact, which he deemed incredible, came to pass. Nine whole months he remained a most affecting spectacle; a monument of the sin of doubting Divine declarations, which we are bound to honour, by believing apparent impossibilities to be no obstacle to the execution of God's purposes.

But what are the chief of saints before sudden and violent temptations? How lamentably do they discover, no less than others, the power of corrupt nature, and stain their characters which appeared almost without a spot before! This teaches us, that the best have ever need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Otherwise, if left to ourselves, splendid

privileges will only expose us to greater shame. Like Zacharias, when Gabriel came from heaven to assure him he should be the father of one of the most excellent of the prophets, we shall fall into disgrace, and incur the displeasure of God.

At length, when the illustrious babe was brought to be circumcised, his father's mouth was opened, his tongue was loosed, and, full of the Holy Ghost, he prophesied, saying,

LUKE i. 68.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

To redeem, signifies to purchase the deliverance of captives, by paying down a ransom-price, through which alone they obtain their liberty. None, therefore, but the wretched and enslaved, as common sense teaches, can need this mercy. Since the Israel of God, then, are visited and redeemed, it follows that they are naturally in a most miserable condition. The word of truth affirms, and universal experience proves they are so, till they receive the benefit of redemption.

Before this blessed hour of deliverance, selfishness and enmity against the truth and

government of God, possess them. Sensuality, pride, impatience, anger, hatred, malice, and hypocrisy, by turns, as temptations occur, are manifested in their tempers and conduct; making them often a burden to themselves, mischievous to others, and always displeasing to God.

This totally corrupt and wicked state, I allow, is frequently coloured over with fair appearances of good humour, honour, social virtue, and the exterior of religion; sufficient to soothe self-love, and deceive spectators no better than ourselves; yet the infallible Judge pronounces, that we are "by nature children of wrath," Eph. ii. 3, and have in us a "carnal mind which is enmity against God," Rom. viii. 7.

Compared with this natural character of man, the unsearchable riches of grace shine to the highest advantage. For, instead of destroying his people, when in a state so guilty, so detestable, the Lord God hath visited and redeemed them.

CHAPTER II.

On asserting Man's native Innocence.

This doctrine taught by Zacharias, proves their error who conclude men are born inno-

cent and good, as Adam was created. Such a supposition impeaches the prophets, apostles, and Christ himself, as slanderers of mankind, and blasphemers of God. For they unanimously assert the ruin of us all, as a race of sinners by birth. Upon this melancholy truth, they found the absolute necessity of redemption; which, indeed, must sink into nothing but a very violent and absurd metaphor, if we are not in a fallen, lost condition. For what absurdity could be grosser, than to affirm that men naturally upright, in peace with God, fully possessed of power so to continue, or to recover themselves if they did sin, were yet visited in such a state, and redeemed from it?

Besides, you can no sooner embrace this delusion, that man is not fallen and lost, than you will take offence at the name of a Redeemer. You will grow jealous of the high honours constantly paid to him, and instead of being thankful for his explaining more clearly the nature of religion, and revealing a future state, which you allow he has done, you will feel a disposition to quarrel continually with him and his apostles, for speaking in the manner they do of his ever-blessed Person, his glorious work, and salvation.

Observe further, the fatal effect of this mistake. Instead of being animated with love to

God, and his service, by inestimable benefits vouchsafed already to a creature vile and sinful; you can receive nothing better from God, on this side the grave, than a set of moral rules, with a declaration that the due observance of them may possibly be rewarded in another world, whilst much more probably your violation of them may destroy your soul. In this view of things, what certain blessing is there granted at all?

How much more beneficial and consolatory is the doctrine which Zacharias, with all the inspired writers, teaches! The redemption of sinners by the Lord God, from a state equally infamous and miserable; which challenges the most devout and thankful acceptance, as the chief of all the mercies of God; that every believer in Jesus, whilst he obeys and adores his precepts as an infallible Prophet, might triumph also in the greatness of his salvation, as a complete Redeemer.

CHAPTER III.

On the Redemption of the Church.

THE people of God are those whom the Father gave to Christ, a multitude out of every na-

tion, and kindred, and people, and tongue—in number as the sand upon the sea-shore. They are distinguished by this title of highest honour, on account of God's special favour towards them, their devotedness to his service, and love of his truth. All these were redeemed by the blood, and made righteous by the obedience, of Christ. When he expired on the cross, he delivered them from the wrath to come; He bruised the serpent's head; He made sure, in the way of holiness, the salvation of every member of his mystical body, the church.

The following scriptures, in their natural, obvious sense, establish this glorious truth. "By one offering (of himself) he (Christ) hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," Heb. x. 14; that is, separated by the choice of God, and consecrated to his service. "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool," Heb. x. 12, 13. In grateful remembrance of this complete redemption, the church is represented as breaking forth into the following joyful strains, "We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks," Isa. xxvi. 1. The ministers of Christ are charged to animate the faithful, in the midst of all their

sufferings, with words which breathe nothing but assurance of victory; "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins," Isa. xl. 1, 2.

In so perfect a manner hath the Lord God of Israel visited and redeemed his people.

This doctrine exposes their mistake, who fancy the excellency of the gospel consists in ascertaining a future state of rewards and punishments, and promising the aids of grace to succeed our good endeavours. Did the gospel contain no more than this, it must still prove insufficient to make obedience to the precepts of Christ either delightful or practicable. Because from our very constitution we all pant after present gratifications, and are seduced to depart from our duty by the prospect of present pleasures; which if religion will not afford, we shall continue to despise it, however it may be our future interest not to do so. We shall delay giving up ourselves to the service of the Lord, till a time of sickness or old age, whilst we conclude so much more may be enjoyed from forbidden pleasures at present, than we shall receive from obedience. This is, in fact, the grand preju-

dice against religion in the hearts of the young and lively, the prosperous and noble. A prejudice insurmountable, so long as religion is represented to them principally as precept on God's part, and obedience on ours; promising no higher joys to us here, than self-applause for having done well, and hope on that ground, such as it is, of being finally happy in heaven. For what in their eyes, who pant for present joy, is all this, compared with brilliant assemblies and sensual delights, or the great privileges of wealth, power, and titles? Do not these things notoriously captivate men of all ranks and ages, till they find in religion an immediate spring of better gratification? But this cannot be consciousness of our own virtues, because in the best, their virtues bear no proportion to their faults, as all know who are not blinded with pride. Neither can it be in the expectation of happiness beyond the grave, because our fears will be stronger than our hopes, till we are filled with peace and joy, as the primitive christians were, in believing.

Some object, therefore, most excellent, and to a high degree at present beneficial, is needful; the possession of which will at once extinguish all eager desire of forbidden joys, by affording better itself. Exactly such an object is the Lord, not considered as a Lawgiver, but as a Friend and Father, as emptying

himself of his original glory, and becoming poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich for ever; dying for us on the cross, and now reigning omnipotent on his eternal throne, giving to his faithful people assurance of perfect happiness with himself in heaven. Here is enough to make us exult. Beauty in the object surpassing all the eye ever saw; benefits flowing from it in never-ceasing streams, above all the ear ever heard; and delight in the increasing knowledge of both, beyond all the heart of man can conceive.

As such an object, the Redeemer proposed himself; and his apostles afterwards in this light set forth his glory. Witness his own declaration to one of the vilest of women, which had instantly such an effect upon her, that she commended him to the whole city, after she had believed in him herself. "Jesus said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life," John iv. 14. On another occasion, when the jews were going to stone him, enraged at his making himself equal with God, behold he asserts, with a double asseveration, the present and eternal benefits inseparable from true faith in his name. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and

believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life," John v. 24. Paul, Peter, and John repeatedly assert the redemption of the people of God to be thus perfect. To the christians at Corinth the great apostle writes and tells them: "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. St. Peter, teaching the very same doctrine, represents the new birth as infallibly connected with everlasting salvation, 1 Peter i. 2, 3. And St. John affirms it when he says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," 1 John iii. 2.

Such a complete redemption of sinful creatures, is a work in mercy and in grandeur worthy of God; a gift engaging the heart, from gratitude and admiration, to rejoice in paying obedience to him; a gift enabling every possessor of it to challenge the whole world to produce an equal good; so far from leaving its possessor to envy the forbidden pleasures of the licentious, that it constrains him to wish for their present happiness—that it might please God, they should become partakers of

the nobler delight, which springs up in his own heart, from the knowledge of redemption.

It is evidently then a mistake of dangerous consequence to suppose, that rules for moral practice, or the revelation of a future state of rewards and punishments, constitute the principal excellency of the gospel; because the observance of these rules, which is to be rewarded, cannot be accomplished without some previous manifestation of the love of God, great enough to allure and captivate: for men must be won by love, not by terror. But commands to sacrifice our dearest lusts, to hate our own lives, and forsake all, under the heaviest penalties, do not make us love the sovereign power which dictates in this manner. And to tell us we are only in a state of probation, where all depends upon ourselves, has no tendency to inspire unreserved confidence in the Lord our God; or to make us worship him with alacrity, sing of him, and praise his name. This can be produced only by the discovery of his abundant mercy, and the unsearchable riches of his grace towards us in our first and natural state, which makes our redemption ever appear marvellous in our eyes. "We love him, because he first loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John iv. 19; ii. 2. This is the christian's vast obligation to gratitude;

this is the cord which binds his heart in devotedness to his God.

CHAPTER IV.

Christ the grand Subject of all Prophecy.

THE scriptures before quoted affirm, that the eternal redemption of the people of God was obtained by the life and death of Christ. He purchased the church with his own blood; so that the heavenly inheritance is as sure to be enjoyed in due time, by every one of his members, as if they were already enthroned in glory. Yet the way leading to this final consummation of all the designs of God's love towards them, is every step through an enemy's country, who are always attacking us, whom we must resist and conquer, or perish.

Lest, therefore, the power, number, and subtilty of our foes, rendered more dreadful by the advantage which they too often gain, should make the christian armies despair, Zacharias, after celebrating the redemption of the church, immediately displays the almighty power, ever exerted in their defence; "And hath raised up a Horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David."

The horn of an animal is its weapon for defence and vengeance, its ornament and beauty too. It is used, therefore, in the prophetic style, to denote the power of the strongest empires. In the same sense we are to understand it here. By this image the exceeding greatness of the Redeemer's strength, and the never-ceasing exertion of it in behalf of his church, are signified.

This Horn of salvation, being the sole preservation of the saints, must certainly be the glory of the Bible, must appear, to the eye of every intelligent reader, the grandest part of the whole, and be exalted from first to last in that blessed volume.

Zacharias affirms it is so; for when God "raised up a Horn of salvation, in the house of his servant David," of whose seed Christ came according to the flesh, this event was in consequence of frequent predictions; "as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

What an honour is here put upon these witnesses; they were men of distinguished sanctity in the judgment of their God. They published not the product of their own invention or private judgment, but the dictates of Jehovah, to give us the truest conceptions of his counsels which we are capable of attaining in our present state. "For the prophecy

came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," 2 Peter i. 21.

These prophets, who succeeded each other in a long series of more than two thousand years, spoke as with one mouth. They delivered a uniform testimony concerning the same grand Personage; gradually unfolding his glories, till he appeared himself on earth, the living Original portrayed in the prophetic books.

For the business of the prophets was not only to mark with authority, as messengers from the Lord of hosts, the path of obedience and safety, of rebellion and ruin; not only to comfort with Divine promises the afflicted church, and in the name of the Lord denounce threatenings upon the wicked; another most important matter was in their commission, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," Rev. xix. 10. They were inspired to delineate him, that upon his appearance, all that understood their writings might cry out with the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" John i. 29; might welcome his advent with the joyful acknowledgment, "Lo! this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord," of whom Moses and all the prophets spake, "we have waited

for him ; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation," Isa. xxv. 9. That all ages of the world might find in them a demonstration that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and adore the exact accomplishment of every prediction in the ancient oracles concerning him.

A series of prophecy respecting the person of our Saviour, from the fall of Adam to the time of Malachi's decease, is at once a full proof of his infinite glory and the certain inspiration of the Bible. Let us take a short survey of it.

Immediately after that one offence, which was the ruin of us all, God was pleased, before the gates of paradise were shut upon our guilty parents, to promise with his own mouth, in mitigation of their distress, that the seed of the woman (Christ) should bruise the serpent's head, Gen. 3. 15. At the distance of a few centuries, Enoch, blessed with a vision of his glory, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment," Jude 14. To Abraham, Jehovah describes him as an infinite Benefactor, "in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed," Gen. 18. 18. Jacob calls him by the name of Shiloh, the Peace-maker, "unto him shall the gathering of the people be," Gen. xlix. 10. Favoured with these notices of salvation, Israel abode in Egypt, till Moses, sent to deliver

them, established, from God's own mouth, a system of religious rites, designed to teach them the work and offices of the Messiah; for the Holy Ghost expressly calls the levitical service, "a figure for the time then present," Heb. ix. 9, to serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.

It was given to lead our views forward to Him who was to come in the flesh, the great High Priest of his church, and the Saviour of it to the uttermost. And to keep alive the spirit of the whole levitical service, with its true intent, holy prophets were from time to time inspired to describe the grand circumstances appropriated to distinguish Christ. His miraculous conception by the blessed virgin; the time and place of his birth; the miracles he should perform; the reception of his doctrine; the treatment of his Divine person; the circumstances of his death, and the glory which should follow from it, both to himself and his church, are all recorded with amazing exactness. So fully did the goodly fellowship of the prophets speak on these things, that when the apostles were sent to preach Christ, and convert the world, their sole qualification for the arduous work, in point of knowledge, was to understand what was spoken concerning Christ, in Moses, the psalms, and the prophets.

This scripture doctrine exposes several mistakes in religion.

The New Testament, many tell us, is all that christians need to study, or at least ought to regard much more than the Old. For what reason? Are they not so joined together by Divine authority, that he who doth not with equal reverence receive both, can receive neither as the oracles of God? Are they not both the dictates of Jehovah, "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness?" 2 Tim. iii. 16. The New Testament continually appeals to the Old. Jesus and his apostles urged this in all their disputes with the jews, to prove that he was the Christ. Those, therefore, who would lop off from the canon of christian scriptures the writings of Moses and the prophets, or insinuate that they are of little use to us now, either have no good intentions, or know not what they do. Neglect these writings, and where will you find God described with such pomp of majesty, and self-evident marks that he is drawing his own character? Where, those high claims to uncontrollable dominion over the universe, as his own absolute property and creation, repeated with such emphasis? Where, the doctrine of a particular providence so abundantly exemplified? or Jehovah's love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity, marked

in such a variety of affecting narratives; and at the same time, his condescending friendship for his servants, under all their infirmities, so invariably manifested? Where will you find the true character and glory of Christ expressed in so many charming descriptions of his person, his power, and the blessings of his government? Several of these interesting subjects are sparingly treated on in the New Testament, because the prophets had insisted upon them before at large. The business of the evangelists was to prove, by the history of the life of Jesus, that he was the Messiah. The business of the apostles, to bear witness of his resurrection, and teach the doctrines which the ancient scriptures contained; which they were able to do, after our Saviour had opened their understanding, and expounded unto them the things concerning himself. But wherever the New Testament was received, immediately the ancient oracles, able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, were received also; and christians were commanded to study them. Thus St. Paul affirms, that the church of God is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone," Eph. ii. 20. St. Peter stirs them up to be "mindful of the words, which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and

of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour," 2 Pet. iii. 2. Is any preference to the New above the Old Testament given in these passages? No; it is a crafty device in those who undermine the oracles of God, to degrade one part of them, under pretence of greater reverence for the other, in order that they may reduce into a very small compass what is allowed to be a testimony absolutely decisive, that so false doctrine may the more easily escape undiscovered. A device, which of late years has proceeded to such a length, that we are now told, the epistles are not to be regarded as of equal authority with the four gospels, any more than the Old Testament to be put upon a level with the New. In plain english, the gospels only are given by inspiration of God. Those who are practised upon to believe this, will find much less difficulty in getting rid of the gospels too, at a convenient time, than in proving one small part of scripture is the revelation of God; the far greater, only the private opinion of fallible men.

Hold fast, therefore, the faith once delivered to the saints, that "*all* scripture is given by inspiration of God." Contend earnestly, from love to His name, your fellow-creatures, and the truth, that God "spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the

world began;" that it is at our peril to despise those writings, or fancy their use to the church in any degree superseded by the publication of the new scriptures.

CHAPTER V.

On preaching Morals principally.

THE doctrine before us exposes the mistake of substituting lectures on morality and virtue, instead of discourses on the Horn of salvation. For though morality and virtue are truly venerable, and of absolute necessity, yet when inculcated without reference to Christ, as their root, support, and sole cause of acceptance with God, they deceive and injure extremely; because in this way we are led to conceive ourselves virtuous, without those deplorable defects and pollutions which, in fact, are chargeable on the best. We are led to imagine human excellence sufficient, the sure and only passport to heaven. And this delusion must prejudice us bitterly against several capital parts of scripture, which pour contempt upon all expectations of Divine favour founded on our own obedience. Hence, we shall deny or wrest those Divine sayings, in which Christ takes upon himself the whole glory of saving

the children of men. And after we are infatuated with the idea of our own excellent virtue, one article of the christian creed will grow odious, then another; till we shall conclude, in the end, that it is much more rational to be infidels than christians. For the self-made idol of deists is a pleasing object to a proud, corrupt mind—allows of human merit and boasting; but the God of the Bible requires us to approach him with shame and confusion of face, for our defilements and offences.

An unguarded recommendation of the excellency of moral virtue, to the neglect of the power and grace of Christ, has contributed to bring on the present increase of deism, and revolt from the gospel, much more than all the formal assaults of its avowed enemies. And deism is often defended upon this very principle, that the stress laid upon articles of faith in the Bible proves a public mischief, by drawing off men's attention from personal virtue, and teaching low disparaging ideas of its worth. Thus, a zeal for morality and virtue, which are of indispensable necessity, may be, and very often is, so misguided as to prove fatal to the soul. For whether men will hear, or spurn it from them as an imposition, Christ is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh to the Father, but by him," John xiv. 6. "He that hath not the Son of God hath not

life," 1 John v. 12, though his virtues may be extolled, even as a pattern for imitation. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema maranatha," 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

Know then the true standard, by which you must try the spirits—every preacher you hear, and every religious book you read. It should not satisfy you, that virtue is earnestly inculcated, and obedience to the commandments of God pressed home, from considerations of his authority, and a judgment to come; for much more than this is required. You ought to esteem the performance deplorably defective, and the preacher no fellow-labourer with the prophets and apostles, unless he displays the Horn of salvation; unless every idol in the human heart, which usurps his place, be thrown down; and all the proud pretensions of self-sufficient moralists, and self-conceited pharisees, be exposed. If a christian preacher or writer treats of morality and virtue in such a light, that no jew or turk would find any offence in his work, is there not cause to charge gross ignorance on the preacher or writer with respect to Christ? If topics which jews or turks would themselves use, are chiefly used by us to enforce moral practice, what advantage does the gospel afford in this grand point? They who can hear or read such discourses without grief of heart, from

love to God and man, are strangers to what the scripture teaches of the glory of Christ's religion; and were they to cease professing it, would suffer, it should seem, no great loss in their spiritual state.

CHAPTER VI.

Christ the Redeemer of his Church from the Curse of the Law.

ALL the prophets, who with one mouth have spoken of Christ, speak of him as raised up, "that his people should be saved from their enemies, and from the hand of all that hate them." We are born in captivity; and after we recover spiritual liberty, our enemies assault us all our days. Some of these enemies, being invisible, are little regarded or known by the world. Consequently, when they hear of a Horn of salvation, raised up to deliver sinners out of their hands, they know not how to conceive the meaning of such expressions, much more to believe their truth. For if they live in peace, quietness, prosperity, reputation, and a good opinion of themselves, they cannot understand there is any better condition on earth, nor desire deliverance.

Thus pride and ignorance hiding our con-

dition from us, we presume we are safe, when our real circumstances are deplorably ruinous. The friendly light of God's word and Spirit are sent to discover this gross delusion. They show us where we are, what we are, and what we want. That we are a race of sinners, in base and voluntary subjection to Satan, the world, and the flesh, condemned by the righteous law of God, and every moment liable to the arrest of the king of terrors.

Each of these foes, as soon as their power is understood, will be found unconquerable by any might of our own; of consequence deserving eminently the name of enemies; compared with whom, all we naturally dread, as hostile to us, will seem as nothing. These enemies are sin, the law, Satan, the world, the flesh, and death. But as the law is the strength of sin; as sin is only committed through the instigation of Satan, the world, or the flesh; and death ensues as the penalty of sin; deliverance from the power of these enemies necessarily includes victory over sin, a victory everlasting. These enemies, therefore, we shall particularly consider, and the way in which Christ saves his people out of their hands.

The first enemy is the law. Man receiving from God a reasonable soul, with all he possesses, is absolutely dependent upon him, and necessarily obliged to obey his will in whatever

instance it is made known. The penalty on failing to pay this most rightful homage is death, the loss of the favour of God, and the misery of his displeasure. Thus the angels in heaven, by one act of disobedience lost all their glory, and are wretched beyond expression. Thus Adam in paradise, by one offence destroyed himself and his posterity. The same law, with the same sanction, God published in ten commandments, accompanied with all the terrible ensigns of his almighty power, to more than a million of his subjects assembled at the foot of mount Sinai; engraving it afterwards with his own finger on two tables of stone. This law, though in itself holy, and just, and good, taking occasion from our sin, slays us. It is become our great accuser and dreadful adversary. It is against us in every attempt we naturally make to escape from its eternal condemnation. It is contrary to us, breathing out righteous vengeance against our persons, as offensive to a holy God, and guilty before him; spurning all our prayers, our tears, and our amendment, as no more compensation for violating its command, than the murderer's tears, or better behaviour, are for his enormous offence.

The strictness, therefore, of the law, in its demands, and the weight of its sentence upon transgression, render it insupportable to

sinners;—an accuser which stops every mouth, brings in the whole world guilty before God, and as vile criminals condemns us all to hell.

Out of the hands of this enemy, the Horn of salvation was raised up to deliver his people. For "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under (that is, subject to) the law, to redeem them that were under the law," Gal. iv. 4, 5. "The strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57. The process, or several steps necessary to be taken, in order to accomplish this deliverance, are worthy of everlasting admiration. For this great purpose, God's own Son began his life in the flesh, in perfect purity, not conceived in sin as we do ours. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child," Prov. xxii. 15, rooted and riveted there; but the holy Jesus grew in wisdom, as in stature. In manhood, we indulge our evil appetites, and live to self; he did always the things which pleased God, and fulfilled all righteousness. We are found full of faults, whenever our conduct is severely scanned; and the accuser of the brethren, might his condemning voice be heard, can always allege with truth a thousand charges against us: Jesus challenged his eagle-eyed foes to convince him of sin, and told his chosen friends, immediately before

he suffered the last assault from Satan, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me," John xiv. 30, not the least taint or corruption to work on, or slightest stain of evil to lay to my charge. Because, whatever the law enjoins of external obedience, or spiritual worship, as due from man to God, was in all his actions, in all his words, in every temper, in every imagination of the thoughts of his heart.

Thus did God's own Son, the Lord of all worlds, fulfil the law, in the form of a servant, that he might save his people out of its hands; that, in the very manner of their redemption, and acceptance with God, through his Divine obedience performed for them, the law might appear in the eyes of all intelligent creatures, more glorious than if no offence against it had ever been forgiven.

This doctrine corrects a mistake often made by many in forming an estimate of the obedience of Christ.

The rising sun in summer is not so charming to an eye of sense, as His life to a mind which can admire spiritual excellency. So complete a union of every lovely quality, without one single flaw, has compelled even his blasphemers to do him honour. And it is common to expatiate on the consummate perfection of his character, as a copy for imitation. But here

many stop. This, indeed, gives him pre-eminence above the most admired of men, yet it is not half his due; for the scripture places the sinless life of Jesus in an infinitely higher light, not only as a perfect pattern, found in no other man, or a necessary qualification to make atonement, but as a work of most efficacious beneficence; of a kind absolutely singular, surpassing beyond all comparison every other service the Almighty ever received, and reaching, in its saving virtue, through all eternity. For no creature can transfer the benefit of his own performances, since perfect obedience is due from every creature, on his own account, to God, by an indefeasible right: but the unrivalled glory of the life of Christ consists in this peculiarity, it is the righteousness of God; by which myriads of sinners, to the ends of the earth and the end of time, are made righteous. To them his righteousness is imputed, because performed by compact upon their account, for their salvation; accepted as such by the Father, and deemed so really theirs, that the righteousness of the law is said to be fulfilled in them, because fulfilled by Christ, who is their Surety, and with whom they are one.

Observe what abounding evidence the scripture affords of this truth. Look so far back as Abraham. The first time believing is ever

mentioned in the Bible, imputed righteousness is mentioned too. For when he believed in the Lord, it (that is to say, what was promised, what his faith received, and on which it terminated, even Christ) was counted unto him for righteousness, Gen. xv. 6. This instance the apostle Paul brings in proof of justification by Christ; which would have been impertinent, if not Christ's righteousness, but Abraham's act of faith, had been the cause of his acceptance with God. Many passages in the psalms extol this Divine righteousness, as the glory and boast of the church; but when God would comfort his people with a more full revelation of the office and work of the Messiah, he established this doctrine by a most majestic proclamation. Jehovah beholds all the nations of the world under condemnation for sin; but, instead of executing vengeance upon their guilty heads, he calls from heaven with this sweet voice of mercy: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God; and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength," Isa. xlv. 22—24.

That this Lord, in whom the church exults,

from assurance of possessing in him both righteousness and strength, is Christ, appears plainly from the application of these words to him twice in the New Testament; and that the righteousness here intended, is for justification before God, is no less plain, because the concluding sentence of this proclamation again affirms, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory," Isa. xlv. 25.

As our everlasting welfare depends on the grace revealed in this truth, the inspired writers frequently assert it. Jeremiah, next in succession after the above proclamation, and well acquainted with it, prophesies, that the name by which Christ should be adored is this, alluding to the proclamation, "The Lord our Righteousness," Jer. xxiii. 6. The angel appears to Daniel, and tells him, Messiah was to come at such a fixed time, not only "to finish transgression, to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity," but "to bring in everlasting righteousness," Dan. ix. 24. Our Saviour exhorts his disciples to seek in the first place "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Matt. 6. 33. the latter being the title to the former; and the office of the Holy Ghost, he affirms, is to convince the world of righteousness, John xvi. 8. St. Paul, who did not receive the gospel he preached from man, nor was taught it, but by revelation

of Jesus Christ, after his kingdom was created, insists on the imputed righteousness of Christ: he styles the gospel, "the power of God unto salvation," because "therein is the righteousness of God revealed," Rom. i. 16, 17; which, a little after, in the same epistle, he declares, is "by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe," Rom. iii. 22.

This declaration, I conceive, after great pains used to explain its meaning away, does clearly assert the obnoxious doctrine of imputed righteousness. For to say the essential righteousness of God is unto all and upon all who believe, is nonsense; or that this expression means faith, or justification by faith, must be nonsense too, because it is plainly distinguished here as the object of faith, and the cause of justification. Cease from torturing the text, and according to its plain sense it must mean the imputed righteousness of Christ, who is God. Neither can this be called a foreign righteousness, because it is imputed only to those who are members of Christ. But the members of Christ, according to Divine constitution, are one with Christ in the covenant of redemption, and in the communication of life from him their Head: a union no less real than that which subsists between fathers and their own offspring. It is, therefore, often represented under that

image, "Behold, me and the children whom the Lord hath given me," Isa. viii. 18.

Further, St. Paul declares, that the perdition of the jews, who rejected Christ, was from their ignorance of the righteousness of God, and refusal to submit to it. He affirms, that Christ is made of God unto his church, righteousness; and the church is made in him, the righteousness of God, 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21. He states at large the way by which death entered, and by which salvation is obtained; that "as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life: for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be righteous," Rom. v. 18, 19.

After this, what more could this apostle add in proof of his favourite doctrine? Only that proof which he did; I mean, his pouring contempt on all the love his heart felt towards God, on all his usefulness towards men, and on every excellent grace which he in so eminent a degree possessed; on all this he pours contempt, counting it no better than loss, or dung, to merit his justification. In *this* light he rejects it with disdain, that "he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but

that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 8, 9.

Perfectly harmonizing with his brother Paul, St. Peter addresses the church, as a society highly favoured in "having obtained like precious faith with him, through," or rather in, "the righteousness of God and our Saviour," 2 Pet. i. 1. Taking all these Divine declarations together, they are surely sufficient to prove the mistake of depreciating the life of Christ, by assigning to it no other use and influence, than as an example, or a qualification to become a sacrifice for sin. We are warranted by them, to consider every part of the Saviour's obedience as beneficial to his people, and imputed to them; to contemplate him as living and labouring every day, for so many years, in human flesh, that in their behalf "might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. v. 21.

CHAPTER VII.

On the Atonement.

THE perfect righteousness of Christ, imputed to his people, was necessary, in order that God might justify them, with ample honour

to his own law. And the infliction of the penalty annexed to disobedience on the offenders' substitute, was no less necessary to make manifest the evil of sin, the Divine indignation against it, and reconcile, in their exercise towards his people, his justice and mercy, his truth and holiness. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings," Heb. ii. 10. And because "the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," ver. 14.

For these reasons, Christ, after paying perfect obedience to the law, died a death absolutely without parallel. All, besides himself, die because they are sinners. He, because sin was imputed to him, and punished both in his body and soul. By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, yet according to his own voluntary engagement, Jesus endured all that variety of misery, which sin deserves. He endured poverty, shame, and torturing pain of body and mind. He died under loud execrations, which were poured out upon him from a thousand tongues: He died under the curse of the law, transfixed by

the sword of eternal justice to his cross. Prodigies then met together, which were never seen before, nor will be seen again: from different causes, heaven, earth, and hell seemed to conspire together to increase his torment, far above all comparison. For this we know from infallible authority, that the Father "spared not his own Son—that it pleased the Lord to bruise him—that he suffered, the just for the unjust,—bearing our sins in his own body on the tree," Rom. viii. 32; Isa. liii. 10; 1 Pet. iii. 18; ii. 24.

By virtue of his death, the full import of it being known and trusted in, the people of God are delivered from the menaces of the law in their consciences. They become dead to it by the body of Christ, being "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God," Rom. vii. 4.

By this means, their obedience to him becomes pure in its intention, and in its extent reaches to every commandment; a service, not from sons of the bond-woman, but of the free; not paid for wages to a master, but from affection to a beloved Father. Not as compelled by that awful threat, Do this and live, offend and perish; Gal. iii. 12. but from a heart devoted to his service, and penetrated with a sense of his high and holy authority.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the Necessity of preaching the Law.

THIS doctrine of the redemption of the church from the curse of the law, through the death and righteousness of Christ, proves it is a great mistake to suppose the law is not to be preached to christians.

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," 1 Pet. iv. 11. But they insist on the special grand design of the law. They tell us it was given to make sin abound, and appear exceeding sinful; to shut up as prisoners all under sin, and thus render the news of salvation by the Lord transporting to our hearts. The oracles of God do peremptorily assert, that the Holy Ghost, the Giver of life, strength, and comfort to the soul, is received, not "by the works of the law," the doctrine of acceptance with God by personal obedience, but "by the hearing of faith," Gal. iii. 2, of salvation through faith. They pronounce those to be in the way to perdition, who seek righteousness, as it were, by the works of the law, even though they have a zeal for God. They divide mankind, not only into moral and immoral, religious and profane, as philosophers and pharisees are wont

to do, but into two classes unknown to either of them; those who are of the works of the law, and therefore cursed; and those who are of faith, and therefore blessed with faithful Abraham, Gal. iii. 9.

From these passages, and many of like import might be cited, you may see how fully the oracles of God treat of the law. What marvel, then, if upon ceasing to preach the law, preaching loses its usefulness? When the law is not explained, it is impossible that sermons, however moral or serious, should ever teach scriptural ideas of the evil of sin, or the nature of pure obedience to God, or of the necessity of redemption by Christ.

On the contrary, open the nature, use, and design of the law, it will soon prove itself an engine of Divine appointment, and admirable efficacy. By laying "judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet," it sweeps away the refuge of lies, under which sinners, of every sort, take shelter. It brings all who hear what the law saith, into a salutary despair of ever escaping the wrath to come by personal obedience; and so makes the Horn of salvation always appear the same necessary defence, and glorious blessing, which the scripture affirms he actually is.

Those who omit preaching the law, suppose themselves justified in doing so, by

limiting what is said on this great subject to the jewish ceremonial law. Ignorance itself scarcely ever made a grosser mistake, though many great names have long pleaded in its behalf. For can you call the ceremonial law, the law written and engraven on two tables of stone? Can you call it spiritual, or apply it to bring in the whole world guilty before God? Yet these are the specific qualities belonging to that law, of which the apostle treats. Or can you think, that when he says, "The law is good, if a man use it lawfully," 1 Tim. i. 8, immediately naming the many immoral offenders which it condemns, that he had any respect at all to the ceremonial law?

I am not ignorant, that it is urged also by those eminent preachers, who never apply the law, as the ministration of death, to the consciences of their hearers, that christians are now under a milder dispensation, which requires sincere, not sinless obedience. But in this assertion there is much fallacy. For by christians must be meant either nominal or real ones; if only nominal, they are under the law, seeking to enter into life by keeping the commandments, and depending upon their own obedience, in conjunction with the merits of Christ, to save them. They are therefore of the works of the law. To rescue them from this delusion, the perfect standard of

duty, with its sanction, must be set before them; they must be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and be convinced how much they are found wanting; and he who does this most faithfully, to destroy all their false confidence, will prove their kindest friend.

But if by christians under a milder dispensation than the law, are meant real ones, who, in the nervous phrase of scripture, "have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them," Heb. vi. 18; they are not only under a milder dispensation, but under grace itself. Yet before they had access into that grace wherein they now stand, they were every one of them, with the great apostle, slain by the commandment, Rom. vii. 11, or they would not have fled to Christ for refuge: through the law they became dead to the law, and are the very persons who prove to demonstration, both the necessity and success of applying it to the conscience.

The increasing desertion of our churches, beyond the example of former ages, is confessed, and is indeed alarming.* Should not

* This desertion of our churches is imputed to the increase of methodism, as it is called. But without cause, since it is most observable in places where there are no methodist teachers. On the contrary, in every parish where the law is scripturally taught, both an increase in the number and attention of the hearers is evident beyond dispute.

then all those teachers, who from sunday to sunday see no increase of their hearers, or good effect of their instructions, change their doctrine? Should they not at least make the experiment, however strange it may appear, whether proving that all men are condemned for sin, without a possibility of being ever accounted just before God through their own virtue, will not be attended with better success? Whether rich and poor will not be more affected by full proof that they are absolutely lost, unless the Horn of salvation delivers them; than by leaving them to think their own goodness will comfort them here, and open the kingdom of heaven to them hereafter? Whether a more conscientious obedience will not be produced, when we see ourselves continually indebted for life to Christ alone, as the children in the furnace were to a miracle of goodness, than can spring from considerations of profit and loss, according to our own conceit of a progress or decline in virtue?

CHAPTER IX.

Peace of Conscience towards God, not the Reward of imperfect Virtue.

THE doctrine that the church is redeemed from the curse of the law, by Christ's own

obedience unto the death of the cross, proves the mistake of supposing that peace of conscience towards God is the reward of virtue. Good people, it is constantly said, have a right to be perfectly free from all fears about the future, from the pleasing review of a well-spent life. From hence the vain and arrogant fancy that even the wretched fragments of what has only some semblance of virtue, in their own conduct, entitles them to its reward. Therefore they grow still more proud and presumptuous; for since no perfect rule of duty is fixed, the vain and arrogant always conclude themselves tolerably virtuous upon the whole, and through this soothing error stifle every rising conviction of their danger.

Those of a modest and serious turn it bitterly distresses, driving them often to distraction, and even to death for refuge: because there are many persons, it is certain, much troubled in conscience, who the world judge need not be so at all. They are just and upright in their dealings, of a kind and generous spirit, devout, and careful to avoid all known offences.

Now that persons of so high a character should not possess this certain reward of virtue, peace of conscience towards God, appears very strange. Men ignorant of the truth al-

ways with great confidence impute this to lowness of spirits, weakness of mind, or a superstitious cast, which involves every object it beholds in gloom. But this is found to be the case with many persons, where there is no weakness of mind, bodily distemper, or superstitious cast. And the true cause of their misery is, from having believed peace of conscience towards God to be the reward of virtue, as we all naturally do, still forgetting that is *perfect* virtue alone, which is the parent of peace towards God. Not finding, therefore, this peace, but, on the contrary, fear and guilt, they conclude he is angry with them. This anger they endeavour to avert by better obedience, yet still find no comfort; nor can they while they seek it in a way derogatory to the obedience which the Lord himself performed. For as this perfect obedience is the sole cause of our justification before God, the sentence of condemnation must remain in the conscience, if we make a true judgment of our state, until Christ is all our peace and hope; because the utmost efforts to lead a good life, must leave us still destitute of the righteousness which the law requires. We may persevere in prayer—we may fast—we may give alms—we may watch over every word, and every thought, and even agonize to keep the commandments;

thousands have done as much—yet, after all, we shall offend in many things.

Whilst men, therefore, seek peace with God, from consciousness of their own goodness, they remain under the curse of the law, which they are always breaking. So long, then, as their earnestness for salvation continues, and this error is believed, they must be in fear. They can find no rest to their souls, till, instead of labouring to attain it by works of righteousness, they seek it by faith in Christ. Could the answer of a good conscience towards God be really enjoyed in any other way, the scripture would be falsified; because it constantly ascribes this inestimable blessing to the blood of the cross, and to Christ's resurrection, as the Surety and Head of his church—calls it his peace, given to his disciples, upon their looking to him for pardon, in despair of help from any other quarter.

Matter of fact, the subject of daily observation, confirms this doctrine. Who are free from distress of conscience before Christ has made them free? Those only who abridge the commandments of God, or are daring enough to think he ought not to require more than they find themselves inclined to do. Or those who, in the dotage of self-love, smitten with admiration of their own beauty, see in themselves nothing amiss. Not a single person,

endued with the smallest degree of humility, and earnestly striving to do his duty, but lives in bitter bondage and frequent distress, till the knowledge of the Prince of peace gives comfort to his soul.

To advise, therefore, persons of good character, when troubled in conscience, to take confidence from their good life—to tell them they can have no cause to fear, since if such worthy people as they are not safe, what must become of all the world, is a fatal mistake. Neither by any means press them to join in the circle of the gay, and the merriment of the thoughtless, as a cure for their melancholy. Such counsel has already destroyed its thousands. For the persons to whom these means are prescribed, having striven in vain thus to shake off the pain of a guilty conscience, when they are directed to repeat the same methods as their only remedy, must conclude their wound incurable. No marvel, then, if strangling should be chosen rather than life, Job vii. 15.

To remove their distress a totally different method must be used. They must be taught that they are much worse and more sinful than they suppose themselves to be; that all they have ever done, or can do, from the motives which have governed them, is wrong; because the thought of making peace with God

by their own obedience, is an insult which pride casts upon his law, is high treason against his crown, and frustrates his grace. They must be told, that a painful sight of their spiritual state is designed in great mercy to undeceive them; to bring them to a confession that they are lost, unless the atoning blood of Christ be received by them as all their salvation. Consciousness of guilt, they must be assured, will ever pain them, sensible as they are now become of the great extent of their duty, so long as they expect peace of conscience from personal holiness, and not from Christ's obedience, which has magnified the law, vanquished Satan, and redeemed the church, to the great glory of God, through all eternity. They must be directed to consider, with great attention and prayer, the scriptures, designed to overthrow the pillars of self-righteousness, and to bring all flesh upon an absolute level, in point of justification, before God; and when the utter impossibility of obtaining true peace of conscience towards Him by personal obedience is perceived, they will begin sincerely to apply to the great Physician, the merciful Healer, whose office, pleasure, and glory it is "to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," Isa. lxi. 1.

Generally speaking, these things are new to persons troubled in conscience; or at least

point out a way of relief, which has not been tried by them, and which, upon trial, is sure to succeed to the establishment of their souls in comfort.

I have often seen the worst consequences follow from giving any other advice to persons labouring to get peace by personal obedience; and the most pleasing ones in every case from confession of sinfulness, and reliance on the blood of Christ to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

CHAPTER X.

On the Power and Devices of Satan.

A SECOND enemy, into whose hands we are fallen, is Satan; for, though many affect to treat the agency, and even existence of this execrable spirit with derision, yet the scripture, from the beginning to the close of man's eventful history, speaks much and awfully of both. Not to admit these passages as full proof, is to make the Bible itself contemptible for the violent absurdity of its phrases.

Leaving, therefore, these modern sadducees to sport themselves with their own deceivings if they will, let us attend to the oracles of

God, and understand from them what have been, and still are the wiles and malicious activity practised against man by that old serpent, the devil. If we inquire of the word of God, who seduced our first parents, robbing them of their original righteousness and paradise? Who afterwards induced their posterity to prostitute themselves to idols, over the face of the whole earth; to shed in sacrifice before them rivers of human blood?* Who dared repeatedly to attack in person our incarnate God, instigated Judas to betray and the jews to crucify him, and, after his ascension, to persecute unto death his members? To each of these questions the oracles of God reply—Satan did it all: who for thus practising upon the children of men, to their eternal ruin, is branded with the names of tempter, deceiver, liar, accuser, and murderer; and charged with "walking about, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Pet. v. 8. Though these detestable names and qualities belong to him, he is nevertheless the prince and god of this world, working in the children of disobedience, Eph. ii. 2, to do the lusts of him their father; who for this reason are called "children of the wicked one," Matt. xiii. 38, and doomed

* De Solis, in his History of the Conquest of Mexico, tells us, that the Indians sacrificed in that city every year twenty thousand lives to their accursed idol.

to suffer for their sins in that world of woe, "prepared for the devil and his angels," Matt. xxv. 41.

Thus full is the account in holy writ, not only of his existence, but his empire over us, his activity, and too successful malice in completing the misery of man.

As an accuser and adversary, he impeaches the people of God of high crimes against the law, urging from thence the necessity of their condemnation, as rebels with himself. To invalidate this claim Christ expired, "blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers," of their grand plea against his people, "he made a show of them openly, (as thus defeated in their malicious accusation,) triumphing over them in it," Col. ii. 14, 15.

The prophet's vision beautifully exemplifies this interesting truth—"He showed me," saith Zechariah, "Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, (that is, Christ,) and Satan standing (as the accuser in jewish courts of judicature was wont to do) at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out

of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel," as a person accused and charged with sin. "And he (the Lord) answered and spake unto those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment," Zech. iii. 1—4.

What is represented so forcibly in this vision, as the way of delivering Joshua, the high priest, from Satan's malicious arraignment, is expressly declared to be the way, in which all the ransomed of the Lord are saved. Their adversary, the accuser of the brethren, follows them, as it were, into the court of judgment, where, to his everlasting confusion, he hears this challenge proclaimed in their behalf: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" to prosecute them at his bar, as guilty? "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us," Rom. viii. 33, 34.

But Satan seeks our destruction, not only by impeaching us of high crimes against the law, and honour, and majesty of God, but by various subtle temptations, practising upon us to this moment, as he did at first upon our

original parents. Trace the wiles by which he prevailed over them. Did he not beguile Eve to imagine that God would not avenge their impious offence, and that death should not follow upon disobedience? "Ye shall not surely die," said the serpent, Gen. iii. 4. By suggestions of the same blasphemous kind, he still leads sinners captive at his will. How often does he deceive men to imagine, that sin is not the cursed, detestable thing, which the word of God constantly affirms it to be; that our Maker will never punish the indulgence of our natural passions, to which we are so strongly excited by that very situation in which he hath placed us; that the gate of heaven is not so strait, nor the way so narrow, that only a few out of many should find it; that all will not be lost, who die condemned by the verdict of the Bible. "Entertain more honourable notions of God; be more kind and liberal in your sentiments; be assured all will be happy; the universal Parent has taken effectual care, that vice shall ever find its own sufficient punishment here; no need can there be for the shocking idea of damnation; it is but the pillar of priestcraft."

By this soothing temptation, this syren song, licentious ears grow quite enraptured; and flattered, like Eve, with the insidious promise of security, Eat, and thou shalt not die, they

give the reins to their lusts, rebel, and in their rebellion perish.

From this snare the Lord, the Horn of salvation, delivers his people, by giving them firmly to believe the words he hath spoken unto them. True faith at once possesses their minds with just, indelible conceptions of the evil of sin, the essential holiness of God, and his avenging justice. Through this conviction, not the effect of education, or customary assent to the truth, but of Divine teaching, they baffle these suggestions of Satan, as Christ himself repelled his assaults, with—"Thus it is written," Matt. iv. 4. By this means also, all the wild dreams about infirmities, temptations, &c., as if they would indemnify us though we commit iniquity, vanish away. Sin is known to be the poison of the soul. Consequently a principle of self-preservation excites us to seek deliverance from it; to take alarm at its approach, and feel painful apprehensions when we have been overcome by some surprise, or violent assault. After much experience of this kind, the understanding is more enlightened, God is more known, the nature and qualities of sin are clearly discovered, and its tyranny becomes hateful to the soul.

Where the case is not thus, (such terrors being unnecessary with respect to many; where the heart, like Lydia's, is sweetly opened

to receive Divine counsel, and just ideas of the love of God and Christ take place from the first awakenings,) still believers in him are preserved no less securely from the wiles of Satan, than if the sharpest pangs, for fear of perishing, had wrung the heart. Both those who have suffered much terror, and those who have felt none, are equally persuaded that "the wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23; every prohibition against it a tender mercy; its service base, like the life of thieves and ruffians; and obedience to God in all things infinitely desirable.

Though this knowledge does not preserve his people from ever offending at all, yet it keeps them from ever being at peace with sin. They groan under its first motions in the heart, and complain against themselves for what others account no evil; it is the vexation of their lives that they are no more holy.

In this manner the subtlety of Satan, as a tempter, liar, seducer, and murderer, is defeated, and the faithful are saved out of his hands.

The other grand artifice by which the old serpent at first erected, and still upholds his empire, is by offering delicious flattery to our pride. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," Gen. iii. 5, dazzled Eve. The towering thought of independence, an amazing

exaltation, even above her high condition, caught her in Satan's snare. He insinuates to her posterity what is tantamount to this—You have powers within yourselves, sufficient to acquire wisdom, to practise virtue, and to attain happiness. By industry in cultivating your natural faculties, moderating your passions, by self-command and self-improvement, your mind shall brighten incessantly with new charms,* and you shall be conscious they are all your own acquisition. Though, indeed, you must stand indebted to another for your creation, you shall be beholden to yourself alone for moral excellency, and rectitude of conduct, which is the whole of man.

Away then with the supplicating knee, the atonement, and Intercessor for transgressors. Away with the aids of grace, and the dictates of revelation. What are these but engines, used by knaves to maintain themselves in affluence and authority? Be assured, where mystery begins, religion ends.

Such artful suggestions of man's native dignity, the powers of reason, and our own sufficiency to perform our duty, naturally captivate all who were before smitten with admiration of their own understanding, good

* See Mr. Hume's Moral Essays, or any of the socinian writers, who abound with this self-sufficient language.

life, and good heart. And these high thoughts, which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and create implacable hatred of his truth, are ascribed upon the best warrant to satanic influence. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

But this snare, so sure to catch the vain and arrogant, cannot take the people of God; because their own experience is a living proof, stronger than a thousand arguments, of the falsehood of such high thoughts. They feel inconstancy, weakness, ignorance, folly, defilement, and corruptions, notwithstanding their unfeigned desires, their fervent prayers, their watchfulness, self-denial, and labour to become what they well know they ought to be. Light makes manifest. Wherefore the greater their progress is in copying the perfect example set before them, the quicker discernment and sensibility they possess of their own manifold deficiencies; of consequence the nearer they approach to heaven, the deeper is the conviction, which they feel, that it is wholly owing to the free grace of God, the inspiration of his Spirit, the sacrifice of his Son, his everlasting love, intercession, and

immutable promises, that they have not already perished, and shall not be condemned with the unbelieving world.

Hence whatever services the Lord's people perform, whatever excellent qualities adorn them, they abhor, as sacrilegious, the first risings of self-complacency. They watch with godly jealousy against their native propensity to be great and good in their own eyes; and thus resisting the devil in his capital artifice, they are saved out of his hands.

After this deliverance, it seems good unto their heavenly Father, that many of the heirs of glory should still feel the fiery darts of Satan, and be called to terrible conflicts with this invisible foe. He is permitted forcibly to suggest the most horrid thoughts, deceiving those who are assaulted with them, to regard them as the offspring of their own minds. In the closet, and at church, when they would ascribe unto God the honour due to his most holy name, they are often violently tempted to believe there is no God, or to suspect his word is falsehood, or to arraign his attributes. Yet these hideous suggestions, from the pain they cause, show plainly from whence they come. They are like the charges of a perjured villain against the innocent, which prove nothing but the malice and daring impudence of their accuser.

Was not the heart delivered from Satan's dominion, there would be no painful feelings, no sighs and tears on this account. His children can hear God's name blasphemed, his attributes arraigned, his being questioned, and be merry in the midst of it all; if they do not themselves join in assaulting the eternal throne. Wait, therefore, thou afflicted and tossed with tempest, on account of these blasphemous suggestions. They are permitted, like other temptations, to prove thy impotence to withstand Satan in thy own might, to exercise thy faith, and try thy patience. In due time thy enemy shall depart from thee, as he did from the great Captain of thy salvation, who was in this very matter tempted, as thou art, and therefore well knows how to sympathize with thee, and to succour thee. Be of good cheer; though this trial be grievous indeed, little danger is to be apprehended from this quarter, in comparison with what we stand exposed to from sensual appetites, from love of money, praise, and power.

CHAPTER XI.

On the Mistake of supposing Heaven will be opened to all Men; and of some native Power in Men to save themselves.

THIS account from scripture, of the cruel artifices of Satan, proves two dangerous mistakes, often vehemently propagated, under the notion of much more rational religion than ancient christianity; and with high pretensions indeed of being liberal, in opposition to it. Many of these free-thinking gentlemen affirm, that heaven is open to all men. Others, who have not yet got quite so far, teach, that men can redeem themselves by their own repentance, after they have been very wicked, without the blood of Christ, and the Spirit of grace; and when they have not, may rest assured of salvation from the mercy of God, by making themselves, through their own moral character, the objects of his delight. Yet, the first of these opinions is as old as the fall, and has ever been a main pillar of Satan's empire. Stronger possession in our minds, than it naturally gives him, he cannot desire; because when once we are so deluded as to believe heaven is open to all men, the difference between good and evil instantly becomes too

dim to be seen by natural men in an hour of temptation, or at least too little interesting. Why should they sacrifice a favourite passion, or lose, or suffer for conscience sake, they will say, when they may indulge, and be safe? Need I produce any other proof, that the notion of a mercy in God, which dispenses with faith and holiness, is a device of Satan, God's enemy, and ours? Beware, therefore, of all pleaders for the impunity of the disobedient, or the salvation of those who die in their sins. Sooner esteem those friends to society, who would abolish the penalties of the law, the prisons of justice, and the sword of the magistrate; than those who say, or insinuate, there is not in God an everlasting antipathy to all evil, and an unchangeable purpose to turn all the wicked into hell. Did only fallible teachers assert the avenging justice of the supreme Governor of the world, this mistake would not be so flagrant. But ponder and weigh the truth. All those holy prophets, by whose mouth God spake from the beginning of the world, who denounced his desolating judgments upon Babylon, Tyre, and Nineveh of old—upon the unbelieving jews, their devoted city, country, and posterity, foretelling their present unexampled condition, sixteen hundred years before the event;—these men of God all of them warn the disobedient of

approaching vengeance, if they will go on still in their wickedness. The most compassionate Jesus utters that solemn exhortation, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat," Matt. vii. 13. He immediately adds, "Beware of false prophets," or teachers, "who come to you in sheep's clothing," meek, mild, and gentle, teaching no such shocking doctrine, as that few will be saved, and many perish; "but inwardly they are ravening wolves," greedily bent on serving their own bellies. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," ver. 15, 16. Christ's apostles after him declare, that there is a resurrection of the unjust to damnation. All these witnesses agree in affirming the perdition of the ungodly, in words so very plain, that no serious christian ever questioned their meaning punishment insupportable. When these things are so, what a fatal mistake must it be to depend upon a mere notion, a wish of your own; a wish, the vile offspring of infidelity and love of sin; in contradiction to such abounding evidence, and infallible testimony of the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all workers of iniquity? Be assured, the scripture can no more be broken, than God himself can cease to reign. All the evil, as well as all the good,

which is therein foretold, must be accomplished upon its respective object. But should unbelieving, impenitent men escape their threatened doom, dying in that character, the scripture would be proved false, no less than if, after all the promises of his incarnation, the Horn of salvation had never been raised up; for that most glorious event is not more plainly foretold, than the perdition of the ungodly world.

Away, then, with the cruel, soothing error, that the mercy of God can save us, without faith in Christ, and without holiness! Those alone are or can be blessed, whom the mouth of the holy prophets, apostles, and Christ himself pronounces blessed. Never, therefore, in wisdom and prudence, ought we to conclude ourselves safe, till their testimony is full and clear, that there is now no condemnation against us.

The other fatal mistake, that men can redeem themselves by repentance, acquire virtue by their own native power, and gain a blissful immortality in contempt of the atonement and the Spirit of Christ, is a chief pillar also of Satan's throne; because such notions make men seem independent of God. For though it be humbly granted, that they did not create themselves; yet, if they want, after they are created, no more the help of God to practise

virtue, than the finished vessel wants the shipwright's aid to sail, how can they be more self-sufficient? And if, after sinning against the majesty of God, his mercy, like a pardon from earthly sovereigns, without any atonement, will admit us into heaven, how trifling must our offences seem, since it is enough to be sorry for them, and repeat them no more! What will not at all satisfy for a capital misdemeanour, in any nation under heaven, and was it proposed as sufficient would be rejected with disdain, is yet, upon this self-exalting scheme, all that God requires when his law is broken, and his honour trampled under foot! It is a most alarming question, "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" 1 Sam. ii. 25. But upon this scheme we may reply, nobody need entreat at all: it is enough that the sinner condemns himself, and for the time to come will do better. Presumption is the child of self-sufficiency; wherefore, if we can repent when we will, and by repentance redeem ourselves, and put off beloved lusts when we please—if all this is in our power, and not in the will of God, whether he will give us his grace to repent, believe, and be saved—if this be true, we may reasonably presume, that, let our condition be ever so bad, all things necessary

for our safety may be done just as suits our humour. Thus shall we be led on to imagine, a more convenient time will come, when we shall live that good life which, without the Spirit of God, and without Christ, shall prove our sure passport to heaven, till death seizes us in our sins. Stand, therefore, ever upon your guard against all those arrogant deceivers, who speak great swelling words of the power of man to redeem himself, to perform duty, or gain heaven, independent of Christ's sacrifice, and the influence of the Spirit. This is no more than Satan's old artful address from the beginning, "Ye shall be as gods," though now vamped up anew, and published under the name of rational, liberal religion. It is an infernal device, to hide our great weakness and guilt; making us, of course, despise the heaven-appointed remedy to save from both, even whilst we profess some sort of faith in the scripture.

CHAPTER XII.

Christ the Deliverer of his Church from the Men of this world.

A THIRD enemy, from whom the Lord, the Horn of salvation, delivers his people, is the

world—the world of unreasonable and wicked men who have not faith. Persons of this character, making up the vast majority in every place, age, and condition of life, are called on this account, as they call themselves with an air of importance, the world. Their friendship, we are taught, "is enmity with God; whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God," James iv. 4; so irreconcilable is the opposition between them. Yet, who can bear to be singular? or forbear to imitate the multitude? Who can subdue the love of praise, or the more violent fear of shame? Who dare oppose the chiefs of the earth? Does not grandeur, power, wealth, or reputed wisdom, keep all in awe around them? Who dare be more religious than the great, the rich, the wise, choose men should be? Add to this, that, in general, men of the world are the very persons we from infancy have been trained up to revere, in youth been glad to imitate, and afterwards owed them great deference, if we do not still remain dependent upon their favour.

Consider the world in this close connexion, and you will easily perceive the ground of that spirited question, "Who is he that overcometh the world?" Is it the man of reason and philosophy, who scorns all vulgar prejudices? or the man whom wealth has rendered independ-

ent, or nobility of birth taught to look down on others as made only to serve his pleasure? No; not one of these is delivered from a dastardly fear of the faces of men. Not one of them is bold enough to perform his duty, in defiance of ridicule and contempt. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John v. 4, 5. This victory is derived from Christ's triumph, and from the performance of his promise. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," John xvi. 33.

The way in which the Lord makes his people conquerors in this combat, is the same in all ages and places. He convinces them of the impious absurdity of valuing the favour of men, more than of God; of fearing momentary reproach from vile, sinful worms, and not fearing everlasting contempt from the Son of man, and all his holy angels. They are led also to look upon their best Friend, their Saviour and their God, covered with shame and spittle for their sakes; and at that sight they feel hatred of all selfishness and cowardice, which would otherwise prevail over them. They are taught also to understand the spirit of those men of the world, who call themselves christians, yet plead custom and fashion

against the plain commands of Christ, in whose name they have no lively hope; in whose cross they see no glory; whom they fear not to offend, nor delight to obey; yet are very angry others should pay him more respect than they do themselves. This discovery not only justifies contention with the world, but demonstrates no man can be Christ's disciple, except he come out from them, and be separate.

Above all, the Lord gives his people his own peace; a pleasing, powerful proof of the wisdom of their conduct, and its excellency. Covered with this armour of light, and enriched with this invisible treasure, sneers from the profane, pity from the formal, abuse from the passionate, and persecution from the brutish, are all endured by them with calmness, and faced with intrepidity. "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues," Psa. xxxi. 20.

This deliverance of the church from her enemy, the world, exposes the mistake, that we may be good enough without giving offence by our religion. It is impossible; for to be a christian, is to have the same "mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus," Phil. ii. 5. But to resemble him is to become obnoxious; for

who, under the power of natural pride, can bear to see their favourite pursuits despised, their boasted virtues slighted, and all the ground of their hope toward God regarded as a delusion? Yet this very treatment of its pleasures, virtues, and religion, the world must receive from you, if you follow the example or obey the commands of Christ.

Though your mouth were never to be opened in reproof, or vindication of the truth, your conduct speaks aloud: of course, the nearer your connexion is with persons conformed to the world, however good they may be deemed, the more provoking must you prove to them from your principles and practice. This will certainly be the effect of true faith; for the declaration is peremptory and universal, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12.

The substantial, unchangeable ground of this offence is given at full length, with great force, in the ancient book of Wisdom: "Let us lie in wait for the righteous, because he is not for our turn. He is clean contrary to our doings. He upbraideth us with offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy, the transgressions of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God. He is made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other

men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits. He abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness. He pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his Father," Wisd. Sol. ii. 12.

In this passage the reasons are strongly marked, why the Lord's people always are hated and despised; for the world charges them with intolerable preciseness of behaviour, affected singularity, great uncharitableness in judging others, spiritual pride, blasphemous presumption in maintaining the knowledge of forgiveness from God, with an ostentation of being his favourites.

Renounce, therefore, the vain thought of being a christian in spirit and in truth, without giving offence to the world. Renounce a selfish, cowardly regard to character, which would deceive you to fancy you may live in all subjection to God, yet escape the censure of the careless, and the hatred of the formal. Remember, the sayings of the Lord are eternal truths: "If the world hate you; ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you," John xv. 18, 19. Is not this proof of your relation to Christ

infinitely better than all the esteem, applause, or preferment which can be gained by such moderation in religion, as will offend no one?

CHAPTER XIII.

On courting the Favour of the World.

THIS doctrine of the deliverance of the church by the Horn of salvation, from her enemy, the world, proves the mistake of fancying our usefulness depends upon the esteem and favour of those around us. Above all things, say many grave persons, avoid the name of an enthusiast, and beware of giving offence, for this will ruin your character, and take away all your influence. To keep clear of real enthusiasm is highly necessary, because it leads to the greatest mischiefs, by pleading private impulses and revelations to warrant practices, principles, or actions, contrary to scripture. It is itself a species of infidelity, and often ends in avowed rejection of the Bible. But the world, having always an aversion to the power of godliness, will brand the faithful servants of Christ with this odious imputation. Necessary zeal for his truth, (in opposition to damnable heresies,) sober singularity, and self-denial, "without which no man shall see the Lord,"

is being righteous overmuch, and gives great offence. The glorious privileges also of the church, I mean the consolations of Christ, the comforts of love, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, are in the judgment of the world rank enthusiasm.

Though these privileges are specified in the grand charter of the church, have been constantly implored in their public worship through all ages, and attested by the most venerable witnesses; yet no reputation for learning, or wisdom, or steadiness of conduct, can secure men from the charge of enthusiasm, whenever they boldly assert these great points.

Must necessary zeal, then, for the truth of God, sober singularity, with the great privileges of the christian church, be disowned or neglected, for fear of losing our character, or doing less good? If so, usefulness depends no longer on real excellency, or the energy of grace, but on the good opinion which the world and Satan are pleased to entertain of us.

O shameful deceit to impose, as it notoriously does, upon so many grave people! How is it, that the nature of things, scripture, and matter of fact, do not convince men, that they cannot serve the immortal interests of their fellow-creatures, till they are offensive to the world? For who are the world, but a vast multitude encouraging each other to despise

christian self-denial and communion with God, for the sake of pleasure, wealth, and power? Now, what less than avowed abhorrence of so base a conduct towards our Maker, can ever bring such persons to feel? Habitual intercourse with them in idleness and dissipation, to preserve a character; or polite silence in their company, whilst they deride the power of godliness or the doctrines of scripture, or talk every one vanity with his neighbour, must keep them in countenance, and in ignorance too. But an open defence of the great things revealed to us; an intimacy with persons eminent for their godly zeal, adorned by a holy conversation, reproves the careless conformists to the fashion of the times. This is to act like a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and prove in the highest degree a friend to man. And if such irreconcilable opposition subsists between God and the world, that the latter is the enemy of the former, nothing less than total opposition to their ways can make this manifest, and prove the means of rescuing some from perdition. In other words, to do good to the souls of men, we must live so conformably to the christian rule, as to give offence to the world, and provoke them to abuse us in some measure.

Hence the church of Christ is addressed in the following tender terms: "I beseech you

therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service," Rom. xii. 1. Yet most reasonable as this oblation is, the Holy Ghost well knew how opposite it must be to the custom of every age. The apostle, therefore, immediately adds, " And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," ver. 2.

With these strong evidences, matter of fact concurs to prove the mistake of making compliances with the world in order to do good in it. For who shine brightest for their extensive usefulness in enlarging the kingdom of God, and adding to it many souls? Were they prudent men, afraid of offending the rich, the grave, or learned? No; they drew the sword, and threw away the scabbard. They came forth to show men their transgressions, without respect to persons or regard to consequences. From the death of the abhorred Nazarene, their ever-blessed Lord, to this hour, the most diligent copiers of his example have been most offensive; so scandalous, that many who believed them to be in the right, and wished to be personally acquainted with them, dared not. Though guilty of no evil practice, nor tinctured with real enthusiasm, their heaven-born love for Christ troubled the

world, and galled them to revenge, in cruelly, disdainfully, and despitefully speaking against the righteous.

Instead of studying, then, to gain the world's esteem, we are commanded to "take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and patience," James v. 10, who, though accounted by some as knaves, by others as fools, by more as madmen, have brought thousands to glory, the eternal proofs of their inestimable usefulness.

When will the prudent conformists to the fashion of the times, let us see such success from their compliances? When shall we behold them honoured with the highest honour man can conceive, a company of immortal souls, by them converted from the error of their ways? No: to be useful either as christians, or as christian ministers, we must copy the labour and zeal of those whom the world could never endure. Give over, then, fearing any thing but hypocrisy before God, and cowardice in his cause before men. Desire nothing but to live the life of a christian. Halt no more between God and the world. If the spirit of the world, pride, carelessness respecting the soul, and neglect of Christ, be not hateful to God, and destructive to men, the gospel, with reverence I speak it, is an imposition. Do you abhor that thought as blasphemy? Abhor as much a

fawning upon Christ from year to year in your closet, calling him there your Lord and God, and then coming out to consult the world, how far they will allow you to obey his plain commands, without saying you are a methodist. Cease rather to profess any allegiance to Christ, than treat him, under professions of duty, with such contempt. "I would," saith he to the church of Laodicea, "thou wert hot or cold; so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth," Rev. iii. 15, 16.

CHAPTER XIV.

Christ the Deliverer of his People from the Love of the World.

By the world, the inspired writers understand not only the ungodly part of its inhabitants, but sensual pleasures, honour, riches, and power: these the beloved disciple calls, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," 1 John ii. 16. To gain a large proportion of what can gratify us in each, is naturally our strongest desire, and the source of endless contests amongst men. Indeed, till we are created anew in Christ Jesus, these

things carry away our thoughts, and captivate our affections, as if they were our chief good; and in order to possess them, we throw ourselves headlong into destruction. But when objects infinitely better are brought before our view, money, state, and sensual indulgences lose their bewitching charms, as toys which delight children become our contempt in riper years. Thus by the discovery and enjoyment of things more excellent, not by stoical disdain, or monkish self-denial, christians overcome the world. The grace of God, by bringing salvation to the soul, teaches them to deny worldly lusts. "We all," says the apostle, describing the faith of the church and its effect, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18.

From hence appears the dangerous mistake of fancying we belong to Christ, though worldly lusts still hold dominion over us. Yet how prone are we thus to deceive ourselves! We "were sometimes darkness," many will say, "but now are we light in the Lord," Eph. v. 8. All preaching for a course of years was the same to us; we received no benefit from it. But now we know the doctrines of grace; we delight to attend where they are displayed, and indeed can bear no other divinity. Does

not this sufficiently prove, that we are the people of God?

I answer, this is no proof the world is conquered, or our minds renewed. We may say and do this, yet be greedy, like Judas, of filthy lucre, and as hard-hearted to the cry of the poor! We may thirst after worldly honours, indulge childish fondness for dress and diversions, be in love with pomp, and even vex every one about us by our evil tempers. Much may be said and done, yet our delight be only in sensual pleasures, our hearts elevated by worldly successes, or depressed by worldly fears alone, and we differ in nothing from scoffers who walk after their own lusts, but in violent zeal for certain articles of the christian faith, which in corrupt minds do much harm.

Do we then profess faith, and mean not to impose upon others, or deceive ourselves? Our victory over worldly lusts must be the indisputable proof that we partake of redemption. The excellency of our religious principles must shine in our business and station. Our spirit must not only be above roguery or fraud, but above covetousness also, and eagerness to get gain. And if wealth and affluence be our lot, we must conquer the enchantments of earthly and sensual gratifications. For without this substantial fruit of Divine knowledge, zeal for doctrines is but a burning fever, not

the genial warmth which flows from the love of God: and such devotion is but superstition, not the worship of Him in spirit and in truth.

What so much imboldens revilers of the doctrines of grace? Professors, whose covetousness and treachery, marked with demure appearance and religious talk, evidently render it unsafe to trust them; who, from a wicked imagination that the election of grace is their sanctuary, and the righteousness of Christ their robe of salvation, conclude that deadly thing, sin, can do no hurt to their souls. Did not the scripture affirm there must be such offences, and were there not many whose christian life and doctrine perfectly accord, we should be almost ashamed of the gospel itself, from the scandalous selfishness of numbers who profess it. And though the only lawful conclusion from such melancholy instances is, that "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John ii. 4; yet these false professors will be loudly urged by the enemies of the truth, to make it odious.

O ye self-deceived professors, enslaved by worldly lusts, hear this and tremble, and turn from your evil ways; ye are answerable for al these sad consequences before God; answerable for strengthening their hands who revile Christ; for aiding them to seduce others into

their wicked errors; for fixing them in contempt of what God has revealed. And to imagine you can be members of Christ, and safe in him, whilst your conduct lays a stumbling-block in the way of the gospel, is an infatuation one would not believe possible, were it not often seen.

The terrible doom awaiting those, who persist to the last in such a mistake, is awfully denounced. "Woe unto the world, because of offences!" at which they catch, and plead to their own undoing; "for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea," Matt. xviii. 7; Luke xvii. 2.

CHAPTER XV.

On the Natural Depravity of Man.

ANOTHER enemy, into whose hands we are fallen, is generally called in scripture, the flesh: a word used to express the debased, corrupt state of our nature, which in its actings and tendency is perfectly contrary to the law and holy nature of God. This is called flesh, because a corrupt and sinful nature is what

properly belongs to mankind, to all flesh, as they are in themselves. For man's nature, forsaken of divine and holy principles, of itself became exceedingly corrupt, and utterly depraved. See what detestable deeds, see what infernal tempers, are the works of the flesh! "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like," Gal. v. 19—21.

Every one of these wickednesses, if left to ourselves in an hour of temptation, we are capable of committing. The charge of such total depravity of nature is denied, and highly resented by creatures so corrupt. We could not be so vile, as God declares we are become by the fall, were we naturally disposed to plead guilty to this charge. For pride, one great part of our disease, so intoxicates, that many who are a curse to society, by their evil example, are far from holding a mean opinion of their own goodness. Hence it should not surprise us to find the violent assertors of man's native innocence, amongst the licentious in principles or practice.

In order to prove we are in the hands of this enemy, a debased corrupt nature, I shall produce the concurrent testimony of the word of God, with the confessed condition of every

man living, even of those who have diligently used all possible means to extirpate this corruption.

Clear and full, in proof of innate corruption, are the words of Job. It seemed hard to him that he must be singled out, as it were, to suffer such extremity of affliction, though a sinner, since he was so from his birth. He urges, therefore, his complaint in that affecting question, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one," Job xiv. 4. This assertion is of more weight, because Job is not here comparing men with angels, but simply speaking of his condition, as born of a woman; born to trouble, because born in sin.

This ancient testimony David himself, an amazing instance of the force of innate depravity, confirms. For to the consternation of all his pious subjects, the joy of his profane ones, and the astonishment of all succeeding ages, David commits adultery, and then murder, to conceal his great offence.

Such enormous wickedness done by one distinguished for his knowledge and love of God, loudly calls upon the most advanced christians to take heed lest they fall. When this backslider, a most conspicuous monument of the free grace of God, is recovered, he delineates, as an inspired penman, all the workings of a broken and contrite spirit, in his penitential

psalm. And here we are taught, that one reason why he was suffered to plunge into such an abyss of sin was, that his fall might stand on record, a demonstration of the justice of God's charge of innate depravity upon the children of men. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest," or in this saying of his, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me," Psa. li. 4, 5. And if David was thus shapen and conceived, the whole human race, naturally engendered, must be so too.

This positive assertion of the inspired father, Solomon, his son, affirms again in the strongest manner possible, after recovering also from the most shameful practice of idolatry for many years. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead," Eccl. ix. 3.

Observe, Solomon does not say the heart of this or that sinner, but of the whole offspring of Adam. He uses the word "heart" in the singular number, because "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." This one heart of the whole human race is "full of evil." The word, here translated "full," signifies as full as a thing can hold, being used to express the fulness of an overflowing river, and of the

wind when it blows a hurricane. The word translated "evil" denotes what is mischievous and pernicious: to others mischievous, to the man himself pernicious. How could the inspired writer more forcibly affirm the corruption of man's native inclinations?

The second clause asserts the excess and obstinacy of this inbred depravity. "And madness (the hebrew is plural) is in their heart." They desire, purpose, choose, and act, with respect to God and their own eternal interest, like persons perfectly insane, whilst they live in their natural state. No promises or threatenings, judgments or mercies, from God; no advantages which obedience to him procures; no miseries springing from the indulgence of vile affections, produce in them any change. Sinners a hundred years old are full of frenzy as in their youth; and then, if left to themselves, in this condition "they go down to the dead"—into a miserable eternity.

Thus the Holy Ghost, by David, affirms the birth of man is in a depraved condition; by Solomon, that during the whole time of his abode here he is altogether evil, and his exit dreadful beyond imagination if left to himself.

The same doctrine was taught by Christ, no less plainly when he was upon earth, than by his prophets before his appearance. "That

which is born of the flesh is flesh," saith the Lord, " and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again," John iii. 6, 7.

Flesh in this sentence is directly opposed to the renewing, sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. But that only which in its nature is sinful, can in its nature be opposite to the Spirit of God. Wherever, therefore, in the Bible the flesh is opposed to the Spirit of grace, the word can mean nothing else but sinful corruption. Therefore to be born flesh, of flesh, is to be the corrupt offspring of corrupt, degenerate parents, so as to need renewing grace from the Spirit of God on that account, even from our birth.

With these scripture proofs (and many more equally strong might be adduced) the condition of the human race manifestly agrees. " Since it is not owing" (as that incomparable reasoner, Mr. President Edwards, argues) " to any external circumstances peculiarly prevalent, which lead men to commit sin. But sin is chargeable, according to universal experience, on persons of all constitutions, capacities, conditions, manners, opinions, and educations; in all countries, climates, nations, and ages. Hence there is the same evidence, that this propensity to sin is in the very nature of the subject, as we have in any other case whatever:

which is wholly from observing the effect is the same in all changes of time and place, and under every variety of circumstances. It is in this way only that we know there is any propensity at all seated in the nature of man. And that we judge right in imputing this depravity to nature, and not to custom or bad example, appears plainly from the manner in which God speaks of the first or natural state of man. There is not the least difference made between one or another—All are lost—All are concluded under sin—All are enemies to God—the whole world is become guilty before him." *

Whatever difficulties, therefore, above our present solution attend the doctrine of innate depravity, both scripture testimony and the universal condition of mankind demonstrate the truth of it.

With these proofs, another of equal force

* See the Reverend President Edwards' book, entitled, A full Proof and Defence of the great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin, in Answer to Dr. John Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin. This performance is the first in the world, without doubt, upon the subject, whether you cousider the force of argument, or the spirit of the writer. The assertors of man's native innocence have made (as far as I can learn) no reply to it. If they can, the credit of their canse calls aloud upon them to confute his arguings. If they cannot, they ought, at least, to cease from vaunting, and no more call Original sin, Original nonsense.

may be joined; I mean the power of indwelling sin, after diligent trial for many years of every possible method to root it out. Thousands in the church of Christ have made the experiment, yet not one of them ever succeeded. After the example of David and Daniel they have prayed instantly at evening, morning, and noon-day; have watched, fasted, and given most liberally to the poor. Their souls have panted for full conformity to the law of God, knowing it to be "holy, just, and good," Rom. vii. 12. Their conversation has been an honour to the gospel, a blessing to their friends, an example to all. Whatever wrong practices they were drawn into by custom, they could easily renounce, and shake off every evil habit. But still the plague of their own hearts remained. They found "a law, that when they would do good, evil was present with them: for they delighted in the law of God after the inward man. But they saw another law in their members, warring against the law of their mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin which was in their members," Rom. vii. 21—23. For after all the pains which ever were or can be taken, "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not," Eccles. vii. 20.

Hence persons of exact judgment and distinguished excellency, have daily confessed

their sins, according to our Lord's injunction, and deplored their defilement to the last. Who ever knew one single exception to the following observation, that the more pains men take to do their duty, the more cause they find to lament their sad deficiences? The more intensely they apply themselves to follow after holiness, the more clearly they perceive their own vileness. As dabblers in natural philosophy grow conceited of their knowledge, when a Bacon or Newton lament their ignorance; so idle, superficial christians feel no depravity within, when St. Paul, and all "who hunger and thirst after righteousness," groan under the burden of the flesh, and feel themselves wretched from their depravity before God.

Now what was never extirpated by the most diligent use of the best means, properly applied for a great length of time, it is evident must run in the blood, must be interwoven in the very frame of man.

Our combat, therefore, with this enemy, the flesh, as with Satan and the world, must continue till we die. Yet the Lord, the Horn of salvation, delivers his people from the dominion of their evil nature, on this side the grave, and from its infection, when he takes them to himself. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. And if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is

none of his," Rom. viii. 14. 9. This Almighty Agent " crucifies the flesh with the affections and lusts," Gal. v. 24. His " fruit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth," Eph. v. 9; that is, in a general, habitual obedience to God, though never without defect or pollution. The " fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," Gal. v. 22, 23; not one, or some of these graces without the rest, but all of them growing together, a beautiful cluster upon the living vine.

So that no one, led by the Spirit, can indulge in any sin, or allow himself to neglect any duty, by pleading the force of natural depravity; because supernatural aid is promised, and victoriously exerted in their behalf, who seek it, to make them " holy in all manner of conversation," 1 Pet. i. 15.

In this condition, the people of God remain. The best of them defiled with sin, whilst in the body, yet all of them obedient to the will of Heaven, till at length they are called to join " the spirits of just men made perfect," Heb. xii. 23. Though they go on their way, therefore, mourning for sin, and each finds abundant cause to cry out, " O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" still each may rejoice also in full assurance of final victory, saying," I thank God,

through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. vii. 24, 25.

CHAPTER XVI.

Self-complacency from good Reputation exposed.

THE scripture doctrine of man's innate depravity, proves the common mistake of supposing those who are free from outward vice, cannot be under the wrath of God. It is hard to condemn ourselves as vile, when relations, friends, and neighbours, esteem us highly. In such a case, can there be any reason, we are wont to say, for looking up with earnest supplication to the crucified Jesus, as lost sinners? Self-abasement to this degree may become felons and harlots, the dissolute or infamous; but is it necessary in persons of good reputation from their youth up? Undoubtedly; for what avails the sepulchres appearing beautiful without, when within there is all uncleanness? If it was not so, would an indictment from heaven, concluding all under sin, be brought against us? Is not this of itself full proof of our great wickedness, however we may be accounted excellent before men? Shall not our Judge be believed in his declaration, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," John iii. 6, sinful and

corrupt; and his apostle in that very alarming assertion, "So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God?" Rom. viii. 8. Must disobedience to parents or base lying, open lewdness or scandalous dishonesty, be chargeable upon us, before we are to condemn ourselves as vile, or confess we are "in danger of hell-fire?" One of the most distinguished amongst the saints of God made a quite different estimate of himself, which stands recorded, to confront all who overrate their good reputation: I mean the Baptist. From his mother's womb he was full of the Holy Ghost. The abandoned Herod stood in awe of him; Emmanuel himself attested, "he was a burning and a shining light," John v. 35. If any person, then, might have alleged, "I am innocent, therefore I need no fountain to cleanse me from my sin;" if any person could have reason to think he did not deserve eternal death for his guilt, this was the man. But what does John think of himself? Behold it, O ye innocent world, and blush for shame! Behold it, and cease to utter error against the Lord to your own destruction! When Jesus comes to be baptized of him, with what humble amazement does he first decline the sacred service, and then cry out, from a deep sense of *his* own defilement, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Matt. iii. 14.

—But he could have no need to be baptized, or washed in the blood of the Lamb, if the best obedience, even from childhood, could have made him innocent; if repentance be the only condition of acceptance with God, or if the consequence of sin be not eternal death, without the atonement.

Does such a one as the Baptist cry out, "I have need to be baptized of thee,"—what ought we to think of our own character? How little, how poor is our supposed goodness, and fair reputation, when compared with his bright example! Let us keep better company than the world. Let us observe the saints of God, and weigh well the import of their expressions, when they speak of themselves before Him. This will soon convince us, that every man in his best estate deserves the curse of the law, from which nothing can save him, but infinite grace through the atonement; the benefit of which belongs to those only, who confess from the heart, that their sin can no other way be cancelled.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Insufficiency of external Religion exposed.

THIS doctrine, that we are all born after the flesh, and have naturally a fountain of evil

within, proves the mistake of trusting in the mere performance of religious duties.

Many very devout people ask, with an air of confidence, "What more can we do? We constantly say our prayers, go to church, receive the sacrament, do no harm, and give alms. Are not we good christians?" I reply, the grand point is, from what motive, and with what end, are these things done? Prayers, which are merely the effect of good education, not from a sense of guilt and want; prayers said to pacify the conscience, or earn heaven, not offered up from hatred of iniquity, or love of righteousness; religious duties performed as a task, not with alacrity, and delight to hold communion with God; and alms given, in order to think well of ourselves, and cover the multitude of sins, make up the religion of a hypocrite in grain. Will you ask then, Whether any thing more than this is necessary to make a good christian?

I would also entreat you to examine what advantage you have received from your religion? Has it subdued your passions? or rectified those gross mistakes we naturally fall into respecting the character of God, ourselves, and the way of salvation? Has it enriched your mind with a treasure of Divine knowledge, to which you were once an entire stranger; a knowledge of efficacy to produce all the fruits

of righteousness? If you grow angry at such close questions, unable to answer them in the affirmative; if you know nothing more of God, or yourself; nor have any proof that you are accepted of Him, more than you had ten or twenty years ago, into what a fatal mistake are you fallen! Utterly destitute of the benefits which constitute the excellency of religion, yet obstinately positive you are a very good christian, and need no Divine change.

Let me add, if your external religion be sufficient, as you confidently suppose, then what passes in your breast, must resemble what the scripture saints experienced: for allowing they might exceed us in degrees of holiness, yet every christian's experience, supposing it genuine, must be of the same kind as theirs. Compare your own with this standard. Watchfulness, labour, contention against the flesh, was the constant employment of their minds. Sometimes they could pray with delight and fervency, often they could not. We see them one while weary, faint, and ready to give up all for lost: in due time their cry was heard, and they sung a song of triumph. Darkness and light, distresses and deliverances, joy and grief, succeeded each other. At some seasons, prayer, the word of the Lord, his day, and house, proved to them a rich repast: at other times they sat like a sick man at table, and

could relish nothing. Now we see all within is peace, and glowing admiration of the truth, ways, and works of God. By and by, trying providences move them to doubt of his love and faithfulness, and to behave themselves unseemly; till recovering, each accuses himself in that humbling confession, "So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee," Psa. lxxiii. 22. Many parts of the Bible prove what is here affirmed, and the 119th psalm at large.

I appeal now to your conscience, who build your hope of going to heaven on your external religion and virtues; are you acquainted with such changes in your mind? or do you not rather hate and reproach this experimental proof of innate depravity as enthusiasm? Do you not say your prayers at one time as well as at another? Do not you do your duty in going to church one sunday just as well as at another? and at all times think, without giving yourself the least uneasiness about the matter, you do as well as can be expected from such frail creatures as we all are? Do you not live a perfect stranger to a change from darkness to light, from fear to lively hope, from grief to joy, on account of spiritual deliverances? Should this be your case, you still want every thing essential to a good christian, if to be one, is to resemble those who stand in the Bible as patterns for our imitation. Because the religion and

goodness in which you confide, is no more like theirs, than an image made to speak by mechanism, is like a living man.

Be no longer then so confident you are a good christian, because you say your prayers, go constantly to church, and give alms. Try yourself by the oracles of God. What think you of your corrupt nature, of your wicked heart? Is the Horn of salvation absolutely needful in your eyes to save you from yourself? Do you find in your own bosom, the company of two armies, the law in your members warring against the law of your mind, the flesh lusting against the Spirit? Or, on the contrary, are you floating down the stream of time, at peace with the world and the flesh, unknowing of any hurt or impediment you receive from either? In this case, the unchangeable decree from heaven is directly pointed against you. Hear it, and consider yourself, and turn unto the Lord:—"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live," Rom. viii. 13.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On easy and polite Religion.

SATAN, the world, and the flesh, as we have seen, are restless in their opposition to us, and always our enemies; from whose power Christ alone can save. How palpable, then, is the error common among the rich and polite, concerning the very nature of religion! It was never designed, say they, to forbid favourite amusements, or abridge us of the liberty to please ourselves from day to day. It is the raving enthusiast's pencil which draws this smiling cherub* with the features of a demon.

Thus under the name of innocent amusements, licentiousness is encouraged, and christian self-denial deemed the penance of gloomy bigots.

The contrast between scriptural religion, and this easy substitute, chosen in its place, will fully appear from the following comparison.

Men ought always to "watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation," says the Judge of all, Matt. xxvi. 41: You may indulge without

* Liberal religion, as some call it, in opposition to ancient christianity, is often represented under the image of a smiling cherub, to denote its great good humour, and the large gratifications it allows us.

fear or scruple, if your fortune can bear the expense, in every diversion, says the smiling cherub. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men who wait for the coming of the Lord," is his command to his church, Luke xii. 35, 36: Enjoy freely the dance and the song, the stage, the tavern, the card-table; after this, the dregs both of your time and spirits will suffice for devotional duties, says the smiling cherub. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me," saith the Lord, Luke ix. 23: There can be no harm in conforming to the vogue, and joining in all mirthful pastimes, kindly provided to relax the mind, and promote good humour, says the cherub. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers: wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand," says the Wisdom from above, Matt. vii. 14; Eph. vi. 12, 13: To make religion a work of so much difficulty, paints the Deity as taking pleasure in the mortification of his creatures, and frightens them from his service, says the smiling cherub. The word of God calls christians to watchfulness, as sentinels

to their post; to run for the heavenly prize like racers to the goal; to hardships and war, as good soldiers; adding exhortations, entreaties, commands to slay every lust, though it be painful as plucking out a right eye; declaring, "Many will seek to enter into life, and shall not be able," Luke xiii. 24; that foolish virgins, and slothful servants, perish together with greater offenders. These exhortations, commands, and warnings, so expressive of difficulty and labour, belong to the ages of persecution, before the world and the church joined in friendly alliance, says the smiling cherub, and only respect that fierce contest; we live in happier days, when our whole duty may be done without any combat, mortification, vigilance, or labour.

O vile seducer! Can the way to eternal glory, in any age, be a life of sloth and self-indulgence? Are not watchfulness, prayer, persevering self-denial, always necessary to preserve the weak, and defend the tempted? Do the pleasures of sin allure now with less attraction than in former times? Are our hearts less evil, or do worldly lusts solicit with feebler force, than they were wont to do in the first century? Or do the power, subtlety, and malice of wicked angels, long practised in the destruction of souls, require, on our parts, less resistance or protection? Besides, what

ideas must men conceive of heaven, who suppose it possible for those to enter there, who know no more spiritual gratifications than the stage, tavern, or card-table afford? who lead their life in such ignorance, indolence, and voluptuousness, that some well-regulated states would have punished with heavy penalties? Unless a transformation of soul take place, persons of this character are no more capable of admission into heaven, than profligate villains, a nuisance to all around them; since there is no more meetness for spiritual enjoyment in one than in the other. And to lead men to hope a life of this kind can end well, is to take part with their evil passions, instead of exhorting them to seek deliverance from their dominion. It is to set aside the essential duty of christians, whilst the worship, for form's sake, is retained. But such heartless worship, in the eyes of men of sense, is a farce; in the eyes of sincere christians, a profanation of the name of religion; in the eyes of God, mockery and insult.

Instead, therefore, of "saying to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us," Isa. xxx. 10, 11; instead of loving this cruel flattery, desire earnestly to hear the whole truth, what-

soever God hath commanded, Acts x. 33. Desire to have the devices of Satan, the temptations of the world, the corruptions of the flesh, all set before you without disguise. Desire that no abatement whatever may be made by the teachers of Christ, in compliance with custom, or to gratify your passions.

CHAPTER XIX.

Christ a Saviour from Death.

THE last enemy out of whose hands the Lord, the Horn of salvation, delivers his people, is death; which, whether its origin, manner of approach, or nature be considered, deserves the name of king of terrors. It entered into the world by Divine decree, to punish the most enormous offence, except the murder of Christ, which the sun ever saw; for man, like the angels, was made upright, though liable to fall; surrounded with a profusion of blessings from God, who beheld his new-made creature with delight, and pronounced him very good. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for

in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," Gen. ii. 16, 17.

Nevertheless, Adam did eat of it, though he knew the threatening included his seed, as one with himself; for it is against all reason to suppose the sentence could contain any greater extent of punishment, than Adam understood the threatening to do. Every possible circumstance, therefore, of provocation met together in this one offence. It was the vilest ingratitude against Divine bounty, surrounding him on every side. It was an impudent impeachment of his supreme Benefactor's wisdom, goodness, and love, as if the command had been foolish, hard, or envious. It was a violent suspicion, if not a denial, of his veracity. It was a wilful opposition to his authority, a revolt from his government, an exaltation of himself above God, in seeking his own interest and pleasure, by trampling upon the honour, law, and majesty of his Maker.

This one offence, big with all hateful qualities, instantly wrought a disastrous change in man's condition, as terrible earthquakes do in capital cities, leaving behind it a sad scene of ruins; for the moment Adam transgressed the threatening began to take place. Instantly the light, the presence, the love, and image of God departed from him, with the immortality which he before possessed; for his deeply-injured

Maker withdrew, as it seemed necessary he should, from rebel man. He summoned him to appear, and hear his doom; and then expelled him from paradise, to wander on the earth a poor, guilty, corrupt, and dying creature.

Death, entering thus by sin into the world, as a punishment of the highest act of rebellion against God, always strikes men with terror, till sunk into brutish stupidity, or till the Saviour has taken away its sting.

The manner of death's approach bears strong testimony, also, to its guilty origin; for till superabounding grace has converted this foe into a friend, he exceedingly distresses the children of men, whether springing upon them from an ambush, or making his advance by regular siege. In the former case, death appals, and seizes in a moment the voluptuous in the midst of their carousals; utterly impoverishes with a stroke the prosperous sons of commerce, exulting in their day-dreams of realizing their wealth; drives, as a whirlwind, the ambitious from the face of the earth, when their honours are blooming, their preferments enlarging, and all their projects ripening to their wish.

What sudden havoc, also, does this destroyer make of domestic comforts, in which we may lawfully delight! A swift arrow from his quiver

strikes to the heart the bridegroom rejoicing over his bride; cuts off a lovely blossom, the only child, from its parental stem; divorces those in a moment whose conjugal affection, matured by years of sweetest society, united them like soul and body—divorces them when the tender pledges of their love most need their mutual care. By such daily inroads this dreadful spoiler harasses mankind, leaving those who have yet escaped his shafts, and still more those who have been wounded, anxious for the absolute uncertainty of all their possessions.

When, instead of thus seizing upon his prey, death advances, as in general, more slowly, his assaults are bitterly distressing.

> ———— All maladies
> Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms
> Of heart-sick agony, all fev'rous kinds,
> And fierce catarrhs, and pining atrophy,
> Intestine stone and ulcer, cholic pangs,
> Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums.
> Dire is the tossing, deep the groans,
> Whilst over them triumphant death his dart
> Shakes————

At length he strikes the blow, which brings on the entire sensible destruction of the body, soon making it too hideous for the eye of tenderest friends to look on, too offensive to be endured at all, a fit tenant for the grave, a feast for worms!

Yet how small a part of the evil of death do all these gloomy, ignominious circumstances contain! They are but the awful introduction to that "outer darkness" which receives those who die in their sins; "for the wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23,—death, opposed to the holiness and happiness of eternal life in the presence of God, which must, therefore, mean a state of hopeless misery.

And can the Horn of salvation deliver out of all this dreadful calamity? Can he cause light to spring up in the midst of such darkness, and fill the close of life with Divine consolations? He can, he does. His all-sufficient grace prepares his people for the combat with this last enemy; animates and succours them in the midst of it; enriches them immensely at the moment of their dissolution, and redeems them at last in the sight of men and angels from every trace of death's dominion.

The faithful are prepared to encounter death both by their knowledge and experience. "They know in whom they have believed, and that he is able to keep that which they have committed unto him," 2 Tim. i. 12. They know their Redeemer is the mighty God, and that part of the everlasting covenant between the Father and him insures their victory over the grave; for it is written, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall

they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead," Isa. xxvi. 19.

These wonderful things of God's law, being certified to them by the Holy Ghost, become the object of their admiration, the foundation of lively hope, and their richest treasure. Hence death grows familiar to their minds, as a translation to enjoy spiritual life in perfection in the presence of their Beloved, the sweetness of which they have imperfectly known already. Answers to their prayers, and a change of state in passing from darkness to light, from death to life, in their conversion, alters the visage of death, and its nature too. Instead of seizing upon them, to root them out of the earth, and pluck them out of their dwelling, it comes to exalt them to glory, and honour, and immortality.

Add to this, the heart of Christ, who endured in his own person the agonies of death, for the salvation of his people, is full of compassion towards them: for we are assured, He is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, Heb. iv. 15. Wherefore "when they walk through the valley of the shadow of death," his tender care and guardian power are over them, so that they shall "fear no evil," Psa. xxiii. 4.

Is this a conclusion unconfirmed by facts? No; it is beyond a doubt that the saints in

Christ have departed with sweet complacency in their countenances, and "abounding in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost," Rom. xv. 13. They triumphed in ancient times to the astonishment of all, to the conversion even of proud pagan philosophers, whose chief was wont to call death 'of all dreadful things the most dreadful.' The primitive christians conquered when they fell. They cried out, "Death shall not be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Death is ours—Death is gain," Rom. viii. 38, 39; 1 Cor. iii. 22; Phil. i. 21.

Now, are we to limit this his overflowing love, as too many who are injurious to Christ and his church do, to the first believers? For at all times he is the same all-sufficient Friend to his people. What spiritual succours, therefore, he supplies, when the body is sinking, appears from the behaviour of many of his dying members. Who can behold them in their last conflict without being compelled to say, They are not left to suffer the sentence of death on their bodies without the cup of consolation to drink? We have seen, we have seen, and thousands can attest, the exit of real christians inspiring every spectator at the same moment with the same request, "Let

me die the death of the righteous, and let my after-state * be like his," Numb. xxiii. 10.

Their bodies, it is true, vanquished by death, return to the dust. Yet their souls, so far from suffering loss, receive unspeakable advantage from this blow. Immediately they live, where the place of their abode, the high excellency of society they join, and their own perfection, fill them with happiness beyond the reach of our ideas: for as soon as "absent from the body, they are present with the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 8.†

* The word "aeherith" signifies an after-time or state; —a state which begins again after some remarkable period. See Mr. Peters' Critical Dissertation on the Book of Job, p. 288, 1st edition.

This masterly writer demonstrates, that the church of God has all along been acquainted with the covenant founded in the promise of a Redeemer, and of eternal life in him. Bishop Sherlock read this dissertation (I have been told) twice over. An unquestionable proof of its uncommon excelleney, since it could please a first-rate genius, in a science to which he had so long applied himself.

† "This scripture," says Dr. Watts, in his Essay on a Separate State, "seems to me so plain, so express, and so unanswerable a proof of the existence of the spirits of good men immediately after death, that I could never meet but with two ways of evading it. The one, that St. Paul might be mistaken. This needs no answer. The other, that this text, with one or two more of the same kind, do indeed speak of the happiness of souls in a separate state, but they only refer to the apostles themselves. I answer, the whole church

Nor is the triumph of death over the bodies of the saints in Christ more than transitory: for their graves are but so many consecrated repositories, each under inviolable obligation to preserve and restore upon demand, every atom of sacred dust intrusted to their keeping. Thousands of years, indeed, must pass between the interment and resurrection of the saints. Still, at the destined moment, the heavens shall open; the trump of God shall sound; the Saviour shall come in the clouds of heaven, with great power and glory. Then shall men and angels see him sitting on his throne, and making all things new. Then shall matter of fact prove, to the conviction of the whole infidel world, that the Horn of salvation has delivered his people to the uttermost, "out of the hands of all their enemies." Then shall he appear "the resurrection and

of Christ is encouraged with this assurance of immediate happiness after death. Witness what goes before, and what follows the text. All agree this belongs to the whole church."

Besides, St. John utterly denies this vast difference, some are so fond of making between the apostles and the whole church, in point of spiritual privileges; by assuring us, the very end of his writings, and consequently of the whole college of apostles, was, that all who received their words with true faith, should have fellowship with them, 1 John i. 3.

If the reader desires to see this matter discussed, he may consult my Duty of Man, p. 491, 2d edition.

the life," John xi. 25, the plague of death, the destruction of the grave. Then shall the vile bodies of his saints be changed into the likeness of his own glorious body, Phil. iii. 21, and become incorruptible and splendid as the sun.

Thus the whole church, consummated in bliss, with eyes full of rapturous love, all fastened upon Jesus of Nazareth, shall cry out, "He hath swallowed up death in victory!"

CHAPTER XX.

On false Confidence in a well-spent Life.

This doctrine, that the church is redeemed out of the hands of death, only by the Horn of salvation, proves the mistake of attempting to subdue the fear of it, by looking back on a well-spent life. An attempt equally absurd and impious in those who call themselves christians. For what is the best life any man can have to reflect on? It does not come up to a thousandth part of his duty. Consider the excellency of God, and of his law; our increasing debt for mercies bestowed, and our great advantages to know and obey him. In these circumstances, above all, should not our love to him be perfectly pure, and more active

than thirst for gain in misers, or love of glory in the soldier's breast? On no account should it ever be mixed with selfish motives, prove languid, much less be violated through love of sin. Yet where is the man upon earth, who can bear to have his life brought to this test?

Again, our love to our neighbour ought to keep us from all evil-speaking, from every expression of unkindness and disrespect; ought to fill us with pity for his faults, and bowels of mercies towards him in all his sufferings. Who alive, dare look his fellow-creatures in the face, and say, in this manner have I ever loved you all?

Once more; our hatred of the first motions of sin, before a purpose of offending is conceived, ought to be quick and effectual to repel it, as our natural instinct is for self-preservation. But how unaccountably stupid in this respect are the most excellent! How often defiled with iniquity, without any concern! The conclusion from this fair stating of man's condition is, that the best life of the best man upon earth, affords abundant cause for humiliation and self-loathing, needs infinite mercy to pass over its offences, and the blood of Christ, who is God, to make atonement for them.

Is this conclusion, so offensive to pride, a conclusion drawn by erring mortals? No: it is

a self-evident scripture consequence from our Lord's command to his disciples, daily to implore the forgiveness of their trespasses; which must imply, that they daily offend. Can the same life then, I ask, so defective and stained; which calls for daily humiliation, which needs infinite mercy, and the blood of Christ to put away its sins,—can this same life be reviewed with pleasure, and give just confidence to disarm death of its sting?

So absurd would it be to look back upon our past life, for comfort in death, however excellent our works may have been. But it is well known, that no truly good person ever trusts in his own righteousness for comfort. This is the mistake of vain, idle people, who know neither God nor themselves; who first make their own rule of duty, and then applaud themselves for their observance of it, because they think they do no harm, and their conduct is not scandalous.

Further, The attempt to subdue the fear of death by consciousness of our own virtue, is in the sight of God a high provocation, no less than a gross absurdity in itself; because it pours contempt upon the heaven-appointed means of vanquishing this last enemy. The scripture teaches, that the death of Christ alone abolished death;—that He tasted death for every one of the sons He should bring to

glory, "to deliver them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage," 2 Tim. i. 10; Heb. ii. 9. 15. The scripture teaches us, that the Saviour led sin, death, and hell, our captivity, captive; and the world, as we have seen, is to end with his triumphant appearance, as their destroyer. Every attempt, therefore, to overcome them by confidence in our own righteousness, is a sacrilegious attack upon his glory; a claim, derogatory to the merit of the blood of the Lamb; a claim, which eclipses the Sun of righteousness. He is as nothing; the well-spent life is all: for we may as reasonably attempt to move at once in opposite directions, as to find acceptance with God in part from our own righteousness, and in part from the sacrifice of Christ.

Fatal mistake! into which many serious people fall, through pride and ignorance. Base treatment of Him, who in his own person overcame the sharpness of death, and, then as the great High Priest of his church, opened the way into the holiest, by his own blood.—Self-exaltation, offensive in the sight of God, as matter of fact strongly indicates. For visit dying persons, who, as is common, endeavour to cover themselves with this falsehood, you will find them, though in full possession of their reason, miserably dejected. Their lips

drop not a single expression to comfort afflicted relations or confound infidels, by a christian triumph in their last hours. Nor is it strange that the Light of life so despised should not visit them, or that there should be no appearance of any advantage, received from the gospel, in victory over this last enemy.

Physicians, friends, relations, generally treat the sick and dying, as if death were not the pursuivant of incensed justice, the beginning of sorrows. And men of this self-righteous character love to have it so; because the least hint that the Judge is at the door, would strike them with a panic. What can have the appearance of delusive hope more than this? Now is the time of trial. Now, when the understanding still remains entire, will pleasing reflections on a well-spent life do the office of a Saviour? Now let us see if the answer of a good conscience toward God, and boldness to enter into the holiest, can be obtained without the knowledge of Christ, and the power of his resurrection.

If this gloomy awful manner of meeting death strongly suggests the idea of false dependence, and the hope of a hypocrite, the scripture is positive in this point. It accuses all, who build their expectation of mercy from God on a well-spent life, as frustrating his grace, and makes the death of Christ appear foolishness

itself: for if there be a law which can give life, then Christ is dead in vain. All who expect mercy in this way, are of the works of the law: but "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse," Gal. iii. 10.

I have dwelt the longer on this mistake, in hopes of relieving many serious and devout people, whose case is pitiable indeed. They strive to be prepared for eternity, by doing many things which are commanded, yet the dread of death perpetually haunts them. They tremble as much at the thought of appearing before God, as if he were an inexorable Judge, and not a tender Father. This dread is owing, not to any particular offences, which pain their consciences, but to a false reliance on the merit of their own righteousness.

May such persons be brought to understand the import, and believe the truth of the glorious proclamation made from heaven, for the full relief of guilty, dying creatures!

"In this mountain (on which Jesus was slain an offering for sin) shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined," Isa. xxv. 6. Such a soul-satisfying repast, are the "spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus," Eph. i. 3. And to crown them all, as it follows, "He will destroy in this

mountain (by the death of Christ) the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations" (in that dreadful darkness which our dissolution brings with it); "He will swallow up death in victory," Isa. xxv. 7, 8.

Acquaint thyself with this almighty Conqueror, and the last enemy shall no more appal thee. After the example of Jacob, Moses, David, St. Paul, thou shalt express thy confidence when thy flesh is failing. "He who liveth, and was dead, and behold he is alive for evermore, and hath the keys of death and hell," Rev. i. 18, will not disappoint thy unfeigned dependence upon the blood of his cross. If the full use of thy reason is preserved, thy faith shall cheer thy heart. The time would fail, only to name the multitude, who have triumphed under most afflictive, mortal diseases, who then have testified, there is a God, who "giveth songs in the night," Job xxxv. 10. I myself have seen whole families comforted for their great loss, by the dying behaviour of a beloved husband or wife, son or daughter. And surely, for our own sakes, we should wish to die in peace, when our tender affections will otherwise greatly distress us, and the taking final leave of dearest relations add much to our sufferings.

May the reader and writer of these lines

feel, and those around us see, that even when we are dying, we are saved out of the hands of death. How shall we then magnify the Horn of salvation, and confirm the faith of those who have believed in his name! Our memory shall thus, in the noblest manner, be engraven on the hearts of relations and friends, who will be taught to connect with our departure, a lively idea of their blessedness "who die in the Lord," Rev. xiv. 13.

CHAPTER XXI.

On the Covenant of Grace.

THE reader may understand, from what has been offered, how well that grand title of Horn of salvation becomes the Lord: since he redeems his people from the curse of the law; from the dominion of Satan; from the power of this evil world; from their innate corruption; from death itself, and the grave.

This salvation of sinners, in number as the drops of dew, we are authorized to affirm, is the grandest manifestation of the glory of God, Eph. iii. 10; 1 Pet. i. 12. A scheme of Divine beneficence, reaching in its saving efficacy from the first offence in paradise, to the day of Christ's second appearance; promised

to Adam, and afterwards established with Abraham and his seed, by a covenant and oath from God.

Thus supremely great is the idea, which Zacharias teaches us to conceive of this affair, by declaring that the Horn of salvation was raised up,

" To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant: The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life."

Observe, the coming of Christ, is called " mercy to the fathers :" by parity of reason, it must be so to all the faithful before his birth, no less than to them. Accordingly the scripture saith, His blood was shed " for the remission of sins that are past," Rom. iii. 25, and " for the redemption of the transgressions, that were under the first testament," Heb. ix. 15. Nor was it unknown to the fathers, or the faithful, that they were to be saved in the Lord : for though the jews in general, like christians, grovelling in earthly pursuits, only expected a Messiah who would exalt their depressed nation to the height of temporal dominion ; yet the spiritual seed always looked

for a spiritual Redeemer. "They saw them (the promises of Christ) afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," Heb. xi. 13.

So deeply were the fathers indebted to God for his grace, that they serve as examples of obedience to the christian church. Yet neither Abel's righteous works, nor Enoch's walk with God; neither Noah's dauntless courage in standing forth a preacher of righteousness to the world of the ungodly, nor Abraham's most illustrious faith, could have preserved them from perishing. Notwithstanding their good qualities, they must have died in their sins, had they not found redemption in the blood of Christ. Through Him they obtained every excellency which adorns their names; the precious faith in which they lived and died, with the crown of glory at the end of their warfare. All was dispensed to them on the Saviour's account, through their relation to Him: for pretensions of any kind to such favours from their own obedience, they had none. They were sinners ready to perish, when God was pleased to choose and call them by his grace; at their best estate polluted; and in exalting them to paradise, mercy rejoiced against judgment: for at all times "the wages of sin was death, but the

gift of God was eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. vi. 23.

Zacharias, therefore, by calling the redemption, "mercy to the fathers," plainly teaches, in harmony with all scripture, that the salvation of those who for goodness stand at the top of their species, is still all of grace. Boasting is excluded; no idea of human merit is to be found; the whole glory of delivering them, as much as others, from the wrath to come, must be ascribed to "the Lamb that was slain," Rev. v. 12.

This chief mercy, at first promised, without particularly specifying the spiritual blessings it comprised, was afterwards ratified with Abraham and his seed by a covenant. And when he, at the Divine command, instantly offered up in sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved; in honour of that amazing act of faith, God was pleased to confirm the holy covenant with an oath. In both transactions, subsequent scriptures declare, (Gal. iv. 28; Heb. vi. 17,) Abraham stood as the representative and father of all the faithful; every individual of which immense society, was no less included in the covenant and oath, than the patriarch himself.

The covenant was gradually unfolded by the prophets, till at the distance of a thousand

years from Abraham, Jeremiah published the following ample account of it:

"This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.

What tender mercy and infinite condescension was it in the Lord God, thus to bind himself, under the most solemn engagement, to save his people! All this was done in pity to their slowness of heart in believing upon the force of a single declaration, though from Jehovah himself. Well he knew what distress the guilty feel, when they behold the glory of his majesty, and the purity of his nature; when they understand the detestable qualities of sin, and the high aggravations which have attended their own offences in particular. What dismaying thoughts possess the mind, when men perceive the devices of Satan; the force of natural lusts in soliciting forbidden gratification; the bewitching allurements in

sensual objects; the torrent of evil custom, their own impotence, and the deceitfulness of the human heart: yet against all these hostile armies combined together, must they constantly urge their way to heaven, if ever they arrive there. The Lord God well knew what must be the impression from these things, upon minds become sensible of their exposed condition,—sensible of the obstacles, dangers, and enemies before them. Either they must throw off all concern for salvation, in despair of success, or be perpetually harassed with the dread of perishing by their foes at last: for if in these circumstances, salvation were no more than promised to him that should overcome, and endure to the end; this would contribute very little to relieve their distress; because the interesting, painful question would still force itself upon their minds, "And who is sufficient for these things?" 2 Cor. ii. 16. And after the least wilful deviation from duty, or advantage gained over them by the enemy, they would be led to say, If we could not stand, how shall we arise when fallen? For these conditional promises, though necessary to define the character of the people of God, and confront abusers of the doctrines of grace, in no degree insure success. But this is the very blessing which our tempted, exposed, and assaulted condition requires. As a ground of

confidence towards God in these perilous circumstances, the church needs, what the armies of Israel enjoyed in old time, an absolute promise, that their enemies should fall before them in battle, Lev. xxvi. 7.

When the promise, covenant, and oath of God, are given for this great purpose, and received by faith, his people can meet all their foes, numerous, mighty, subtle, and successful as they have been, without dismay; can endure the hardships of war with patience; can confidently expect a favourable turn, when all seems to be against them; can renew the charge, though wounded and driven back, depending upon the succour they shall assuredly receive; and plead for it with growing importunity as dangers press, till they come off more than conquerors; singing, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake," Psa. cxv. 1.

Without this holy covenant and oath of God, to ascertain beyond failure the salvation of his people, redemption itself wants a solid foundation to rest on, and must be defeated: for how should those be able to cope with the tempter, more than a match for Adam in paradise, who are destitute of his original righteousness? How, without positive assurance of all-sufficient help from God, are they to presume they

shall conquer an army of foes, stronger by many degrees than that which vanquished our first father in all his unimpaired strength?

But thanks be to God for a better covenant, established upon new and better promises! He has rejoiced the hearts of his people with the certainty of final victory. He has left upon record his unchangeable purpose to save their souls in the following express terms:

"God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec," Heb. vi. 17—20.

The same idea of complete redemption Zacharias teaches in this prophecy: for the Horn of salvation was raised up, that the people of God, "being delivered out of the hands of their enemies," and assured of glory by the covenant and oath of Jehovah, "might serve him without fear, in holiness and right-

eousness before him, all the days of their life."

Behold the utmost wish of upright christians! an absolute security that they shall persevere in dutiful allegiance, and uncorrupted affection to the Lord; neither seduced by sensual allurements, nor supplanted by the deceit of the subtle, nor overpowered by the assaults of the mighty; but having their heads covered in the day of battle, shall return victorious from the hard-fought field, to be "unto their Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, which shall not be cut off," Isa. lv. 13.

All, all this is absolutely secured in behalf of the people of God: for they are "visited, redeemed, and delivered" by the Horn of salvation "out of the hands of their enemies, that they may serve," and his word and oath are given that they shall serve him in holiness, in devout observance of all his ordinances: thankful for their deliverance; acknowledging his righteous dominion by unfeigned obedience; ascribing not unto themselves, but to his grace alone, all the good that is done in them and by them; zealous for his honour, and active in advancing his cause.

His people have also infallible security, that "they shall serve him in righteousness;" that is, in the practice of sincerity and truth, justice, kindness, and charity towards all men,

especially the brethren, "all the days of their life;" in the constant tenor of their conduct—before the Lord, from pure motives; not such as pride or hypocrisy, desire of praise, or mercenary self-love, suggest.

Such is the scripture character of the people of God. What can be conceived more excellent? To serve the Lord is the glory of angels; to serve him as they do, full of reverence, yet free from slavish fears, or painful suspicions, is the privilege of his people. To wear the royal livery of "holiness to the Lord," amidst all their infirmities, temptations, and enemies, still persevering in obedience, is their high distinction. Such a charming idea, the inspired writers unanimously teach us to conceive of the mystical body of Christ, which is his church.

CHAPTER XXII.

On the Knowledge of Salvation.

The doctrine of this prophecy proves the mistake of accounting the knowledge of salvation, wild enthusiasm, spiritual pride, and blasphemous presumption, as it is common to do. For a present deliverance from the curse of the law, the dominion of Satan, the world,

and the flesh, wrought by the power of the Lord, in consequence of a covenant and an oath, for the benefit of his church, insuring their perseverance "in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life," is a demonstration that they shall never perish; and, according to express testimony of holy writ, designed to be so understood and believed.

I beg leave, therefore, to offer some proofs in favour of a doctrine, which, from the beginning, has been the glory and triumph of christians, though now, with other considerable parts of revelation, fallen into general contempt, and treated with derision.

It is plain, then, from many declarations, that God greatly delights in the members of Christ, as their reconciled Father, and they are commanded so to regard him. "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God," John xvi. 26, 27. But this paternal love cannot be manifested in temporal blessings; because many of the faithful, in every age, are poor, afflicted, and evil-treated. Nor would prosperity satisfy them; because they value and long for salvation above all things. With one heart and voice they say, "Thy favour, O God, is better than life itself." How then can he act towards

them the part of a gracious Father, if in a world full of troubles, and incapable of being satisfied with creature-good, they are to be kept in anxious suspense about their eternal welfare! Yet it must be so, unless they enjoy the knowledge of salvation; because, without this, though the Lord of glory be contemplated hanging on his cross a propitiation for sin; though the promises made to "perseverance in well-doing" be received; and they are now conscious that "with simplicity and godly sincerity they have their conversation;" yet, since no certainty can be obtained, that they shall be preserved in this state; since the most sincere at one time, at another may prove most insincere; and true worshippers may turn out traitors, rebels, apostates,—in circumstances thus to the last degree precarious, what peace can be enjoyed in the service or family of God? What peace when none can be sure, till they join "the spirits of the just made perfect," that they shall escape "the fire prepared for the devil and his angels?"

Should it be said, that upright christians may have a good hope, though no knowledge that they shall be saved: I reply, this must be founded upon the promise of God to preserve them, and must cast out fear, or it will not manifest to them the love of God as their reconciled Father. But if the foundation of

this good hope is the promise of God, and the effect strong consolation, there is the full assurance of faith, whether the name be admitted or not.

Besides, if God be the reconciled Father of all who are his children by faith in Jesus Christ, as the scripture affirms, why are the endearing testimonies of his love to be withheld from them? When our own children prove their affection to us by cheerful obedience, are we wont to be reserved on our part, in giving them to know the pleasure we take in them? Are we backward in assuring them, that we shall promote their welfare to the utmost of our power? Such tokens of paternal love always invigorate filial affection. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13,—the Holy Ghost, whose office is to be the seal, the Comforter, the earnest and pledge of the eternal inheritance.

How then will those disputers answer it to God, who choose to divest him of the bowels of a Father? who brand with opprobrious names the rich communications of his love to those who walk with him uprightly? who represent him only in the awful character of moral Governor and Judge of all, sure to make

strict inquiry into our conduct, but seem prejudiced strangely against the consequences of that endearing relation of an affectionate parent—that "his secret should be with them who fear him, and that he should show them his covenant; that he should come unto them and make his abode with them, filling their hearts with joy and peace in believing, and causing them to abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost," Psa. xxv. 14; John xiv. 23; Rom. xv. 13.

But if we are taught to conclude, from the goodness of God, and his paternal love to the church of Christ, that he will give them to know that they shall certainly be saved, the truth of this conclusion is much more confirmed, when the knowledge of salvation is proved to be the best preservative from disobedience, and the strongest incitement to lead a holy life. Yet, in the very nature of things, every superabundant manifestation of undeserved love, when understood, must have this effect. For though we may abuse and insult mercy exercised towards us, it is only whilst we know not our own deserts. Those who think they have received but little, will love little, whatever favours are bestowed upon them. Those who, contrary to their acknowledged demerit, have received much, will love much; as Christ has decided the matter. For this is the love

of God, that we keep his commandments," 1 John v. 3. Almost incredible are the efforts which have been made to serve a beloved person, where sense of excellency in the object has concurred with gratitude for favours received. Such instances are the embellishment of history, the wonder and delight of all mankind.*

Most strange then would it be, and contrary to the very constitution of our nature, if the manifestation of God's everlasting love to those who know they deserve everlasting destruction, (which is the case of all real christians,) should not constrain them to love him unfeignedly in return, all excellent as he is.

To place us only within the possibility of eternal life, by a conditional ransom, (pardon the expression,) or to encourage us in the midst of ten thousand foes with a conditional promise, that if we exert ourselves to the end

* The common people of all nations, even soldiers and sailors, though in general immoral to a proverb, always show the force of love upon their hearts towards a compassionate, generous commander. Thousands of his soldiers would sooner sacrifice their lives, than see him perish for want of their help. Nay, if it be but a dog who is attached to us, there are very few who feel not themselves constrained by the affection of the poor animal to love him again. From hence calculate the force with which the knowledge of the everlasting love of God towards us must, in its natural tendency, operate.

as we ought, we shall conquer, but without positive assurance of all-sufficient aid to persevere, leaves a dread upon the spirits of falling into endless misery, by a final miscarriage; for we can never tell what a total change of our condition, from good to the reverse, a year or a day may bring forth. Consequently, if our concern for salvation is strong, we must be agitated like men whose all lies at stake in a most perilous enterprise, where few in comparison escape with their life. What joyous hope, what warmth of gratitude, can ever spring from such a prospect?

Suppose, on the contrary, that God, for his great love wherewith he loved us, is pleased to make a covenant, and confirm that covenant by oath, that all who really commit their poor, helpless, guilty souls into His hands, who is given for salvation to the ends of the earth, shall, in spite of all their enemies, "serve him in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of their life," and be raised up every one at the last day—how forcibly adapted is such a plenary grant to engage the heart in the service of God; to make men fear and tremble before his goodness, feeling something of a sacred horror, when solicited to presumptuous offences! How mighty in efficacy, should they commit sin, to load them with condemnation, and fill them with a sense of their own

vileness, and thus prove the means of their recovery.

Facts confirm the truth of this reasoning. We cannot deny the salutary effects which flow from a manifestation of the everlasting love of God to the soul, when we see the wisest, humblest, best of men, made such by this very means. For instance, Abraham was an idolater, a syrian ready to perish; but when Jehovah appeared to him, promising to be "his shield, and his exceeding great reward," Gen. xv. 1, he was ever after the friend of God. Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and Daniel, all christians agree to admire, and are commanded to imitate. What made them to differ? The love of God manifested to them in such an abundant degree. Who does not stand amazed at the lives of the apostles, and, above all, at the labours of St. Paul? Yet how few discern the cause of their superior excellence! They all loved much, because they were all assured that "their names were written in the book of life;" on which account, Christ commanded them to rejoice, and not in their apostolic gifts or authority. He engaged his veracity, that, when he left them, he would return again, to receive them to himself in glory.

The same certainty of everlasting salvation was possessed by the primitive church of

Christ. Witness the apostle's declaration to the faithful at Corinth, that all their afflictions were light, and but for a moment; "For we know, (saith he,) that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," 2 Cor. v. 1. Witness his forbidding them to go to law before unbelievers, by appealing, with surprising boldness, to their knowledge that they should judge the world and angels; be present on thrones of glory, to attest the justice of the final sentence passed on all that perish, 1 Cor. vi. 1—3. Witness his commendation of the faithful, for "taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods, because they knew in themselves they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance," Heb. x. 34.

Human nature, it is confessed, is at all times the same. And our enemies and temptations are nearly so. Wherefore, the same manifestation of the everlasting love of God to the soul, which produced in old time such excellent fruits, such unshaken attachment to God, would work in a similar manner at present. And it is upon this account that I conclude we must enjoy now, as fully as the saints of old did, assurance of the love of God towards us, in order to make us "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit

the promises," Heb. vi. 12. Since it seems a thing absolutely impossible, that such christians should love and delight to obey God, who think they honour him, and commend their own modesty, by denying the knowledge of salvation till the judgment-day, or the hour of death—like those who were always confident, that to be absent from the body would prove an immediate translation into the presence of the Lord, 2 Cor. v. 8.

Further, it is necessary that there should be some invaluable privilege appropriated to upright christians, designed as a means, not only of engaging more strongly their affections to the Lord, but of detecting and confronting false professors of the christian faith. This decisive touchstone is the knowledge of salvation. Talk only of an uncertain hope of going to heaven through the mercy of God, and you will find no one without it. From natural instinct, the basest of men flatter themselves they shall escape the wrath to come; and conclude they know as much about their future allotment as any body else does concerning themselves. Wherefore they remain easy and presumptuous in gross darkness to the last.

But, from the doctrine of this prophecy, such self-deceivers may be confronted. Their presumption may be overthrown by proving

that the faithful enjoy at present an inestimable privilege, to which they are utter strangers. Propound the knowledge of salvation, built on oaths, and promises, and blood, promised to every member of Christ, which they all enjoy, or seek diligently to obtain; immediately the hypocrisy of false professors stands detected, because they are convinced in their own consciences, that this precious gift from heaven belongs not to them. Hence they must confess themselves to be what they are, or deny against plain scripture evidence, that our heavenly Father is thus bountiful to his children. Wherefore, in all the resentment which envious self-interest can excite, they blaspheme the knowledge of salvation, unable to bear the sight it gives them of their own poverty and misery, as Cain was to endure the Divine favour manifested to his righteous brother, full of faith.

I add further, it is perfectly rational to conclude, that different motives to obey God predominate in the different states, through which we must pass in our way to heaven. Fear of wrath, like the rod to little children, is of great use in alarming conscience, in working by the principle of self-preservation upon captive sinners to cry mightily for deliverance. Yet much more excellent principles afterwards actuate the faithful; because what proceeds

only from servile fear and mercenary self-love all mankind despise. How much more, then, must God reject it as refuse! Yet so long as we live uncertain whether we shall be saved, higher motives to obey God can scarcely take place in our breasts; because if the weight of eternal things is duly felt, but the issue remains in absolute suspense, we must fear more than love; dread more the punishment of sin than hate its properties; obey more in order to gain eternal life, than from delight in God or his commandments. And is not this to be very mean, and selfish, and mercenary; that is, unholy to the last? No services whatsoever, springing from such base principles, can honour either the law or the Lawgiver. In the midst of all we can do, with these views, we only resemble the monkey, who refrains from breaking the china for fear of the whip, or is in very good humour for the sake of the nuts!

But this reproach has no place, when we have received by faith the promise, covenant, and oath of God, "that we shall serve him all the days of our life in holiness and righteousness before him." Obedience in this case springs from gratitude and true nobility of mind. It is obedience in quality the same as that which angels pay, obedience to the perfect law of liberty. The "will of God is done

on earth, as it is done in heaven," not for any advantage to be gained, but because the Lord is "worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power." "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood," Rev. vi. 9. 12.

These are some of the solid reasons why we believe that upright christians may know that they shall certainly be saved. The charge, therefore, of wild enthusiasm, so audaciously published by many modern divines against the full assurance of faith, proves a charge derogatory in the highest degree to the goodness of God towards his church; it is injurious to the cause of holiness; contradicts repeated declarations of scripture, and robs the faithful of the noblest motives to obey their God.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A further Defence of the full Assurance of Faith.

THE reproach cast upon the church of Christ, as guilty of wild enthusiasm in maintaining the knowledge of salvation, has been proved groundless. No less so is the charge of spiritual pride; for there is no pride in being absolutely certain of what God has been

pleased to bestow. Is it pride in us to maintain that we are greatly distinguished in the place of our nativity above slaves, jews, turks, and idolaters? And why may we not possess, and know we do so, spiritual as well as temporal privileges without self-exaltation?

Besides, all who believe have already received in Christ himself a gift infinitely richer than everlasting salvation. If it be no pride, therefore, in his church to be certain he hath died for them, it can be none in them to affirm that they shall be saved through his death; because the favour of being enabled to lead a holy life, and at the end of it to obtain admission into heaven, is as nothing compared to redemption by the blood of the Son of God. If you have not known and believed this before, attend to an obvious proof of it.

What God is pleased to fix our attention upon, as the highest expression of his love, must be beyond all comparison his richest gift. But our God never says, he so loved the world as to provide a future state of reward for the righteous, but so as to "give his only begotten Son," to the end "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. Herein is love; herein is it commended, that he gave his Son to be "the propitiation for our sins," 1 John iv. 10; who died for us when we were enemies to God.

"Rivers of pleasure at his right hand for evermore," the scripture supposes, must be their inheritance, for whose redemption a price above all price has been paid. If this be denied, what force of conclusion or idea of truth can be found in St. Paul's reasoning: "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life?" Rom. v. 10. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. viii. 32.

When the faithful, therefore, affirm their knowledge of salvation; they only conclude, that He who loved them so much, when in rebellion against him, as to give his own Son for them, will not, after they have laid down their arms, ever love them so little as to cast them into hell;—that "He who endured the cross, despising the shame," for the joy of saving their souls, will not afterwards see them perish for want of sanctifying grace.

Were so great a privilege, as the knowledge of salvation, said to be acquired through any goodness in themselves, or secured by their own superior wisdom or power, it might be called spiritual pride. But when all is ascribed to the promise, covenant, and oath of God, to him alone is the whole glory given. They only make a just estimate of their own

state, as he hath been pleased repeatedly to declare and solemnly confirm it: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus," Rom. viii. 17. And if his faithful people must not believe that their salvation stands absolutely secured upon this sure foundation, for fear of spiritual pride, they must, in order to be humble, regard the strongest engagements which God himself can give with doubt and suspicion.

To the charge of wild enthusiasm and spiritual pride, against those who maintain the knowledge of salvation is a privilege of the christian church, that of blasphemous presumption is generally joined, but without cause. For when men promise great favours, and, to exclude the most distant ground for suspicion, stipulate to perform them, who ever calls it presumption, in the parties to whom the promises are made, to conclude all will be fulfilled? We should think this still more unjust, when the ability, character, and fidelity of the promiser add confirmation to the security.

If then the Most High promises, covenants, and swears by himself, that his people, "being delivered out of the hands of their enemies, shall serve him in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of their life;" can it be blasphemous presumption in them to

conclude assuredly, that he will not falsify his word, alter his covenant, and perjure himself, by not bestowing the promised blessings upon them?

Again, what should we think, if an affectionate parent had not only subdued the enemies of his children, but left each of them at his death, a rich inheritance, by a will valid in law, and pleadable by every one of his heirs therein specified? Should we not say, it is the intention of the testator that, when this will is opened and read to them, that they should look upon the estate as their own? But such is the case of Christ and his church, as stated at large in holy writ, to help our infirmities in conceiving of spiritual things. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," Heb. ii. 14; and shed his blood to confirm to them a testamentary right to the legacy he hath bequeathed them; which, for this reason, he calls "the blood of the new testament." He is himself "the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance," Heb. ix. 15.

The reality, therefore, of this will and testa-

ment cannot be set aside, without disgracing our Lord and his apostle, by interpreting away the efficacy of his death. But till this is set aside, it can be no presumption in the heirs to claim their inheritance under that Divine testament, and be certain they shall receive it in all its fulness.

Should it be said, (which, as far as I can understand, is the only remaining objection,) that none can know they are themselves the heirs, I reply, this is an imputation upon the wisdom and goodness of our Maker, almost equal to the denial of the testament itself. For we read in scripture, that God has made a covenant, or grant, unto his people, which stands confirmed by his oath, and ratified by the blood of Christ. All this, we read, was done, that those who "flee for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before them" in Christ Jesus, "might have two immutable things" to trust in, and derive from thence "a strong consolation," Heb. vi. 18. But how can this be, when no one is to know that the benefit of this covenant and oath belongs to himself? It might full as well have never been given; for how trifling is the difference between no covenant and oath, and between a covenant and oath to which no one can infallibly lay claim? And this objection is the more reproachful, and the more weak, because the Holy Ghost, the

Spirit of truth, is sent to seal the faithful to "the day of redemption," Eph. iv. 30, and to teach them to "know the things that are freely given unto them of God," 1 Cor. ii. 12. So that if none of the church of Christ can know they shall be saved, then neither the love, promise, covenant, and oath of the Father —neither the life, death, intercession, and grace of the Son, taught and confirmed by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, are a sufficient foundation for the knowledge of salvation. They cannot be safely depended on. Is not this a blasphemous absurdity?

Beware, therefore, how you take liberty to abuse the church of Christ for maintaining their high privilege; since, in so doing, you reflect equal dishonour on the office each Person in the blessed Trinity bears in the plan of salvation. Expose, with what severity you please, every base pretender to this unspeakable grace, and we will, we do join with you. Men whose air and talk bewray forwardness, and self-conceit, and evil tempers, confute their high pretensions. Object to the making assurance of our eternal felicity, or interest in Christ, essential to the faith of a christian. We will allow the difference between weak and strong believers. But let not the truth itself, the glory of the church of Christ, the superabundant loving-kindness of God, be

denied, reproached, and blasphemed, on account of many impostors. Amidst the arts of subtle disputants against Christ, and the miserable wranglings of professed believers about the meaning of his words, attempt not to rob humble souls of what alone can carry them above all perplexity, the full assurance of understanding, faith, and hope. Attempt not to bereave the excellent of his flock of their joy in waiting for the dawn of eternity, by telling them that assurance is wild enthusiasm and spiritual pride. Level not the children of light and of the day with hypocrites and infidels in this most interesting matter, the knowledge of their future allotment. Nor go on to encourage all lazy, ignorant, wicked professors of christianity with this soothing falsehood, that none upon earth know that their sins are forgiven, and that their souls shall be saved.

You cannot oppose the doctrine of the full assurance of faith, without maintaining that it is for the honour of God, and the good of men, upright christians should remain in darkness or doubt; contrary to what has been proved by scripture testimony.

I would proceed one step further, and entreat you to examine, whence such violent prejudice against the knowledge of salvation takes its rise? Not from good-will to men;

because the lot of humanity calls loudly for such a healing balm, for such a refuge in life and death; not from zeal for God, or the honour of his word, because this exceedingly exalts the grace of God, and unspeakably enhances the value of revelation; not from a well-informed regard for holy practice, because the holiest of men possessed the knowledge of salvation themselves, and earnestly urged all whom they taught "to make their calling and election sure," 2 Pet. i. 10. But if violent prejudice against this doctrine cannot take its rise either from love to God, or man, or holiness, take care that it does not spring from a desire to pacify conscience, alarmed with the report, that others are so much more favoured than yourself; or from gross ignorance, not having devoutly searched the oracles of God; or from envy, which cannot allow those privileges to be possessed by another, which we possess not ourselves.

CHAPTER XXIV.

On the Abuse of the Covenant of Grace.

THE doctrine of this prophecy proves the fatal mistake of many religious professors. They justly affirm, that the promise, cove-

nant, and oath of God, are an infallible security that not one of the elect shall perish. But, at the same time, they seem strangely reserved and cool upon the point of serving the Lord "in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of their life:" as if this was not as much secured, the means as the end, and no less a blessing. They will speak perpetually of the infirmities, spots, and falls of the elect; so that one is at a loss to discern any holiness in them, or any benefit they derive from Christ, except that of escaping the flames of hell at last.

This is a mistake which it behoves every preacher and hearer of the doctrines of grace carefully to avoid, and zealously to oppose; because it is very common to charge both with weakening the obligations to obedience, and making Christ a minister of sin. And where the doctrines of grace are taught, Satan has no other resource to uphold his tottering throne, than that of beguiling men to imagine the everlasting covenant will afford protection, if not to antinomian rebellion, yet to carelessness, formality, and sloth. At the same time, it must be confessed, that, from the apostles' days to our own, this utmost stretch of human depravity has appeared, wherever the scripture doctrines have been maintained. Some of the most false, proud, lewd, covetous,

and oppressive of mankind, each practising his iniquity till death, have been fierce advocates for the everlasting covenant, though enjoying not one blessing from it.

It is necessary, on all these accounts, to allege several proofs that every religious professor, who fancies himself excused in any degree from serving the Lord "in holiness and righteousness," under pretence of being safe in the everlasting covenant, is a miserable self-deceiver, a hypocrite, and traitor in the church of Christ, against various indisputable testimonies of his guilt and prevarication. He is thus guilty against the plainest testimony of the covenant itself, of which he makes his odious boast; for this is holy—an absolute grant of knowledge, power, and grace to his people, enabling them to serve the Lord acceptably, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people," Heb. viii. 10. Wherefore the circumstance of slightly regarding personal obedience, instantly stamps a man's character, no less than calling Jesus accursed. It proves him to be an alien to the covenant; it convicts him of imposture upon the spot, in laying claim to that Divine grant, which is the promise and certain means of sanctification, himself remaining unsanctified.

The end and design also of the covenant and oath, no less than their nature, bear clear testimony against such a religious professor, as a hypocrite. For both are proofs of the immutable purpose of God to save his people in a way of holiness, which proofs they greatly need. To them, sin is the greatest evil. They walk in a steep and slippery path, beset with snares, and infested with watchful, cruel foes. So that they would be utterly disheartened, through the grievousness of the way, were they not comforted by gracious engagements from God in their behalf. All dependence, therefore, upon the covenant and oath, for any other purpose or view than to serve the Lord with full assurance of success, is a bare-faced perversion of the express design for which both were revealed. It is like perverting the proclamation of salvation in Christ, the grand encouragement for sinners to return to God, into a reason to hope for salvation, though we never return to him at all.

The covenant and oath were given for the benefit of brave soldiers, to make them continue such, not to screen one scoundrel coward; to cheer true-hearted, manly sufferers for the sake of their Commander. What is this to a traitor, who holds correspondence with his foes, and favours them? Such a one is proved, upon the clearest evidence, an

impostor, when he pretends to trust in the covenant, and should be treated accordingly.

Religious professors of this cast deceive themselves, in contradiction to the practice of the most excellent, who have received the covenant and oath of God as an infallible security to his church that they should be saved. Who speaks so fully on the high subjects of predestination and election, from whence the covenant springs, as St. Paul? But did he slight personal obedience? Did he watch, did he pray, did he mortify sin, or labour less in the service of his Lord, on this account? Did he not appeal to the witnesses of his life, and the Searcher of his heart, how holily, how justly, how unblamably he behaved?

What use did the primitive believers make of the election of grace, and of the everlasting covenant, which St. Paul preached? Did they think slightly of personal obedience? On the contrary, see how he exults in the sanctifying virtue of this doctrine. The believers at Rome were spoken of, he tells us, through all the christian societies in the empire, for the obedience of their faith, Rom. xvi. 19. And he returns ardent thanks to God for the churches of Thessalonica, which were his glory, "and ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia," 1 Thess. i. 7.

There are great numbers also to this hour,

who reap the same glorious advantage from the everlasting covenant. Their discourse is profitable and animating; their watchfulness and self-denial, striking; their cordial regard to the duties of their station, and their humility, beautiful in the eyes of all around them.

Now, either these venerable witnesses did not understand the nature, design, and end of the everlasting covenant, or every careless professor of faith in it must grossly deceive himself, must be full of hypocrisy.

Such an unhappy mistake is also made against the testimony of conscience, which can enjoy no peace with God, but in obedience to his will. For though some evil workers boldly affirm the covenant is their sure protection, no lively hope springs from hence. It may stupify, like false dependence on the infinite mercy of God, so common in the world; but it can do no more; because the Bible is the pretended warrant, from whence such hypocrites would draw this conclusion in their own favour. But the Bible denounces wrath against all workers of iniquity, in terms to the full as plain as those which assert the infallible salvation of the elect. Now it is not in the power of man so firmly to believe one part of the book of God, as from thence to be easy with respect to eternity; and yet so firmly disbelieve, at the same time, another part of the same

unerring volume, as not to dread the wrath it denounces to our condemnation. Besides, peace of conscience is the gift of God, which hypocrites can never receive; because He is of purer eyes than to dwell with evil. He ever frowns upon the rebellious, and under that frown, every heart, not hardened to perdition, must ache.

Even large experience of his love, joined to clear knowledge of the adorable plan of salvation, makes no difference at all in this matter. No sooner can sin be deliberately committed by those who are justified, and shall certainly be saved, than the soul instantly suffers, as the body does by a stroke of the palsy. The Divine presence withdraws; the love and glory of Christ become obscured; condemnation fills the conscience. The hands which would now lay hold on the covenant, shake and tremble; distressing doubts and fears, whether all past experience has not been a delusion, strongly assail the mind. Prayer is without access to God, or any comfort obtained, till brokenness of heart begins, and sincere lamentation for the offence; till the Lord has been often and earnestly besought to heal the backsliding, and restore comfort to the mourner.

All these particulars we read in the case of scripture saints, after they had been overtaken with a fault. We find them recorded in the

lives of the most excellent; and they are experienced by every member of Christ, whenever betrayed or surprised into any evil thing, contrary to the tenor of his upright conduct.

And till God ceases to be holy, to be jealous, to love his people, and promote their interest, these things must be so. Otherwise, he would encourage them to despise his holy authority, and lightly regard committing what his soul abhorreth. Consequently, all religious professors who trifle with sin, or think little of the absolute necessity of bringing forth fruit unto holiness, under pretence that they are safe in the covenant, either know nothing of the grievous self-reproach and distress which ingenuous minds feel upon offending God; or foaming out their own shame, speak as if there was no other reason to refrain from sin, than to escape the misery of hell. Provided, therefore, infernal misery can be avoided, it is of small moment, whether God be pleased or provoked. Is not this the very sentiment and temper of a hypocrite unmasked?

Such religious professors deceive themselves against the clearest testimony of the absolute necessity of personal holiness, in order to enjoy heaven itself. All pleasure springs from suitableness in the object to the faculty which it gratifies. Sounds full of sweetest melody

can give no pleasure to the palate, nor delicious food to the ear, from want of this correspondence. For the very same reason, a place of perfect purity cannot possibly yield satisfaction to the unclean. The presence of holy angels, and a holy God, have nothing in them to please such fallen spirits, but all to confound them. We see some, even upon earth, so divinely changed, that the slaves of sin are under restraint and awe before them. What then must be the effect of infinite sanctity? There can be no passage from a state of natural depravity, to an immediate possession of glory. Sinners must first come as "lively stones, and be built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ," 1 Pet. ii. 5: in which holy education, the very temper and constitution of heaven is obtained. The whole scripture teaches this truth, but never more clearly than in the passages which assert the doctrine of predestination. In one, believers are said to be "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that they might be holy," Eph. i. 4: in another, that they are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ," Rom. viii. 29: in a third, that those whom God forcknew are chosen, "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," 2 Thess. ii. 13. So that

as the faculty of reason is necessary to qualify men for communion in society, no less necessary is love of righteousness, and hatred of iniquity, to make them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," Col. i. 12.

The scripture affirms, I allow, that there is a very wide difference amongst the members of Christ, in the degrees of their personal obedience. Some bring forth a hundred-fold, some only thirty; yet all possess excellent knowledge, lively faith, and love unfeigned, from which they conscientiously obey.

Hence personal obedience is constantly declared to be the distinguishing mark of the people of God. See how their excellent character is drawn: "They are undefiled in the way, and walk in the law of the Lord; they seek him with their whole heart: they do no iniquity: they esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and hate every false way," Psa. cxix. 1—3, 128. There would be no end of repeating testimonies from all the prophets, that "the way of the just is uprightness," Isa. xxvi. 7.

But let us hear the Saviour himself:—"If a man love me, he will keep my words," John xiv. 23. He will not only talk of my glory, or shed tears at the relation of my sorrows, which the vilest have been known to do, but

he will reverence my authority, and, as my friend, do whatsoever I command him.

What impudent impostors, then, ought those religious professors ever to be accounted, who, like Judas, eat and drink at the Lord's table, profess to have the clearest light and knowledge of his will, and then say, or seem to say, that sin in the elect is a matter not greatly to be abhorred.

Such religious professors deceive themselves against strong evidence of the misery inseparable from known transgression. To live in the breach of any commandment of God is necessarily to be wretched; because every one of them is given only for our good always. Obedience to him in faith, humility, and love; in meekness, patience, and entire resignation; in mercy and kindness to every creature, are all peaceful, pleasing sensations: their opposites are irksome to bear. Perseverance and watchfulness in earnest prayer, diligence in searching the scripture, and using every means of grace, cause the faithful to abound in spiritual blessings, as vernal showers cover the earth with plenteous fruits. On the contrary, from laziness, formality, or levity, we become barren, confused, and dark in our minds, unable to withstand temptation, unable to bear the cross, and strangers to all delight in God.

Let the most exemplary christian give way

to passion, or defile himself by lasciviousness; let him do an unjust thing for gain, or neglect stated prayer in secret, presently a melancholy change will be perceived by others, or felt at least in his own soul. He will neither be able to speak for God, or pray to him, as he was wont to do. The election of grace, the covenant and oath of God, neither prevent nor diminish these dreadful effects, which follow and punish wilful disobedience in every degree.

And can you be satisfied in such a state of soul? Suppose you had a patent from heaven, that you should certainly be saved twenty years hence; but from this hour should know no communion with God in fervent prayer, in deep humiliation for sin, in joyful gratitude for his mercies, in love and obedience without dissimulation: but, on the contrary, that you should remain proud, impatient, passionate, obscene; a miser or a drunkard, a murmurer and complainer, or an idle consumer of your precious time, till a few days before you expired: would it please you to receive salvation in this illegal way, rather than "in holiness and righteousness before the Lord all the days of your life?" No one upon earth has face enough, I should think, to avow so shameful a choice. Yet know that if any branch of personal obedience, or means of attaining

higher degrees of holiness, which God has appointed, be by you despised, presuming on the covenant and oath of God in behalf of his elect, this is actually in a measure your own choice.

But if none of these proofs, already advanced against self-deceiving professors of religion, who abuse the doctrines of grace, are regarded, there is still one consideration to be addressed to their self-love. Such persons pretend they are confident of their safety. Yet they cannot be safe until the Judge of all becomes changeable as we are: for his whole mind on this head is fully revealed; there is no room left for a doubt. Whom does he compare to the stony ground, and to the seed sown among thorns; to foolish virgins and slothful servants? Professors of faith in his name, who were weak and wicked enough to imagine his grace would prove a sanctuary to protect them from the punishment of their sins, although continued in from this false confidence. To make this delusion appear the more dangerous, our Lord himself draws the character of some eminent professors of faith and ministers in his church. They were men who wrought miracles before the unbelieving world, to glorify his name, and enlarge his kingdom. Yet these splendid gifts, so beneficial to others, do not prevent the loss of their own souls. When

they plead in the great day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them," saith the Lord, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. vii. 22, 23.

How decisive a proof is this scripture, were there no other, that we cherish a fatal presumption, when we plead the everlasting covenant in excuse for unfruitfulness in the service of God! No, if we cannot appeal to Him that we watch, and pray, and keep his commandments, our hearts are false. We hear before our trial what must be our doom. Neither can we believe the words of the Lord, thus plain and peremptory, yet fancy ourselves amongst the elect: for a wicked or an idle servant is a contradiction to every character given of them by the Holy Ghost.

Whenever, therefore, upon professing to be convinced of the truth of the doctrines of grace, you entertain slight notions of the absolute necessity of holiness, and begin to neglect secret prayer, or use the means of grace without prizing them highly; whenever you delight to hear of final perseverance and finished salvation, but feel secret disgust when urged to "present yourselves a living sacrifice unto God;" be assured you grossly mistake the

nature, you pervert the design, of the holy covenant. Cry to God, if the thoughts of your heart may be forgiven.

Thus the fatal mistake, too often found amongst religious professors, who receive the scripture doctrines of predestination and election, but disregard personal obedience, stands confuted upon their own principles. Since upon these principles, such a construction of the everlasting covenant is a flagrant contradiction to the testimony of conscience; to the essential character of a disciple of Christ; to the generation of the faithful in all ages; and must certainly, if persisted in to the last, bring on everlasting destruction, according to our Lord's declarations. These various proofs are not to be resisted, but by that hypocrisy, which is capable of abusing and turning into poison every scheme of religion which God can propose.

These proofs of the absolute necessity of holiness, in full consistency with the doctrines of grace, sufficiently secure obedience; because by these proofs Christ and his apostles confront and expose hypocrites. They do not ever, as I remember, deny that the church of Christ is accepted in him, and complete; justified through faith, once for all, without the deeds of the law. In this manner they defended the truth against all charges of licen-

tiousness, which from the beginning were made against it.

And every other scheme for promoting holiness will do, in the end, much more mischief than service to the cause of holiness. For every other scheme establishes the old covenant upon the ruins of the new; makes the righteousness of faith give place to the righteousness of the law; deeply shades the glory of the Redeemer's life and death; robs his church of the strongest and purest motives to obedience; and, in the conclusion, as certainly overthrows the gospel, as antinomian blasphemy itself. The only difference between the popish doctrine of a second justification by works, and antinomian abuse of the doctrines of grace, the two extremes, lies here:— The plan of a second, final justification by works produces an apostacy from Christ by slow degrees and fair appearances, thus beguiling the simple. Antinomians, with their heaven-daring falschoods, too gross for any but abandoned hypocrites to bear, stab the gospel to the heart at once in the face of the sun.

CHAPTER XXV.

On the Error of exalting Morality to the Disparagement of Faith and Holiness.

THE doctrine of this prophecy proves clearly this fatal mistake. Yet what confident pretensions to merit! What self-satisfaction do we see many take in the supposed sufficiency of honesty and benevolence, who, notwithstanding, possess but a very small share of these excellent qualities! insensible, it seems, that moralists, (as they affect to call themselves,) who serve not the Lord in holiness, are of all men most unjust; are enemies to mankind in several capital respects; direct opposers of God; and incapable of admission into heaven without an entire change of heart.

Profane moralists are the most unjust of men; because the highest degree of injustice is to defraud our greatest Benefactor. But our greatest Benefactor, beyond comparison, is the Giver of all we enjoy, and of our every capacity for happiness. Wherefore adoration, esteem, gratitude, humiliation for every offence committed against him, with supreme love, are the things which are God's—due to him by an indefeasible right positively required

from us all. When the jews of old withheld from him the tithes and offerings which were demanded to support the temple service, where the God of Israel was worshipped, he accused them in these forcible terms :—" Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me," Mal. iii. 8. But if this was robbery of God, what is it to annihilate the first and great commandment, under pretence that cordial regard to the temporal welfare of our fellow-creatures is sufficient? To every person who holds this mistake, we may say with the utmost propriety,—Thou that abhorrest injustice, dost thou commit sacrilege? How ridiculous are all thy pretensions to a high regard for moral conduct, when thou thyself livest in the commission of the basest theft any creature can commit, that of robbing God, and teaching others to do the same, yet account themselves good men!

I prove further, that moralists, by extolling honesty and benevolence, to the disparagement of faith and holiness, are enemies to mankind in several capital respects: enemies by keeping them in gross ignorance of God, his works, his gospel, and salvation, as if these things were of no consequence; in teaching them to despise devotion, the source of the best pleasures we can know on earth: without which every advantage of nature or station

is apt to puff up, prosperity to intoxicate, and extreme adversity to plunge into desperation: without which solitude proves very irksome, society full of contention, and every condition of life dissatisfying: without which men of all ranks and orders are forced to fly to childish sports, to mean, despicable, wicked ways of consuming their short term of life, allotted for nobler purposes.

See your claim, O ye irreligious moralists, to be called benevolent towards your fellow-creatures, considered as individuals; so cruel is your boasted compassion.

Considering them as members of a community, your maxims and practice are in a still greater degree pernicious: for every society under heaven suffers much from the wily and powerful; because, without higher sanction, human laws are easily evaded in a thousand instances. Against this calamity the fear and love of God are our sole defence. Where these govern, no wrong will be done to man. The whole creation immediately becomes an object highly respectable, as the workmanship of God, whose will is, that none should hurt or destroy. Pour contempt on devotional duties, the heaven-appointed means of producing and maintaining the fear and love of God, you leave society (notwithstanding your own benevolent example) defenceless against

the assaults of our worst passions; passions which fill the world with injured women, forced into prostitution for a morsel of bread; with the cries of defrauded orphans and widows; with quarrels, enmity, and bloodshed. For lust, covetousness, and revenge, will seldom be quelled but by devout supplications to God; nor evil desires, the seed of evil actions, resisted but by those who have conscience toward him. What amends, then, can the strictest regard to equity in your own dealings, or the most generous acts of pecuniary benevolence, make to society, for the immense mischiefs, sure to follow from slighting religious principle, as if it were a superfluous motive to be good. Do you exclaim, in the warmth of your benevolence, against doing wrong to a single fellow-creature, and yet prove a malignant to society itself, by tearing up the very foundations on which all restraints of conscience respecting God are established; I mean devotional duties?

Besides, when we consider our real condition as a race of sinful creatures, who can be reconciled to God and saved only in the way which he hath appointed, profane moralists will be found injurious to mankind, infinitely above the fraudulent and villanous. These we naturally guard against and detest, though they can only hurt us in our present

transient property; but profaneness brings on the ruin of our immortal souls, by denying or despising the command to live a life of faith and holiness. Moralists, by affecting to know no duty beyond justice and benevolence, erase from the mind of all who regard them, a sense of God's government over us. They teach us to imagine that faith and devotion belong only to weak bigots. They lead us to deny every truth, even the most important, he hath revealed; thus rendering us, by our profaneness, eternally incapable of admission into that world where God is all in all.

What the end of these moralists must be, unless they are converted into devout christians, a character they now hold in contempt, judge ye, after observing their direct contradiction to the dictates of God.

He commands all his people to pray in secret; to pray always; to worship him, and diligently search the scripture. Moralists are confident there is no need of so much religion; because men may be very good without any devotion at all. God dwells upon the absolute necessity of faith, ascribes to this grace a kind of omnipotence, connecting with it everlasting salvation. Moralists violently dislike laying such a stress upon believing. They substitute, therefore, honesty and benevolence in its place, esteeming these virtues

quite sufficient. God, by every turn of expression which can alarm conscience, or persuade, claims supreme love to himself as the first instance of duty; pronounces every man destitute of this divine affection accursed; strictly charging us, "whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," 1 Cor. x. 31. Moralists sneer at the malediction, nauseate so much piety, reproach the terms as being unintelligible; asking, What is meant by the glory of God? and suppose him more honoured by their moral conduct, than by all the prayers and acts of faith in all the saints since the world was made.

Hence it is evident, that whilst other sins are no more than a breach of some particular branch of duty, profaneness despises the great object of all. Whilst other sins are so many attacks upon different parts of the Divine law, profaneness subverts the authority of the whole. Consequently, there cannot be a greater opposition than is found in moralists (as they call themselves) to the majesty and will of God; to his truth and ordinances; to the temper of the church on earth, and of the whole company in heaven. None, therefore, can be further from salvation, none in a state more incapable of admission into the world of everlasting piety and devotion.

That so heavy a charge should really stand in force against some of the most admired characters among men of the world, is a melancholy reflection. It is more so that many who call themselves christians should be fatally deceived, to conclude strict integrity, and warm benevolence, the whole duty of man.

Let such very superficial thinkers learn to examine, by the touchstone of truth, from whence actions proceed, and their natural tendency. Then, they will no longer most irrationally conclude, any action can be truly good, where the principle is essentially defective; or any quality in an object lovely, which, upon the whole, proves exceedingly injurious to God and man. How comes the Saviour to join the doctrine of the sadducees with that of the pharisees? To teach us that self-sufficient moralists and devout cheats are criminals alike; that prayerless, honest men and hymn-singing villains are much more nearly related than either will choose to believe. For which cause, the same perdition is reserved for hypocrites and unbelievers.

Whenever, therefore, you observe a man despising the house and day of God; speaking in terms dishonourable to true devotion and holiness of life, priding himself at the

same time in his own favourite sentiment, that an honest man is the noblest work of God, pity and pray for him. Be not dazzled by the amiableness of his natural temper, strict adherence to justice, tender humanity, and uncommon benevolence. Esteem not a profane moralist, on account of these striking qualities, either worthy or innocent, or a good member of society, much less a christian. Because these qualities, charming indeed as they are, only enable him to do the more mischief, like vast abilities and boundless generosity in some mover of sedition. In him such virtues are a grievous misfortune to the public ; for they put it in his power to spread the baneful infection of profaneness. They make him appear to undiscerning eyes a noble friend to his fellow-creatures, whilst his principles and maxims undermine the welfare of society, and continually militate against the present and eternal interests of every individual, against God and his Christ.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On John the Baptist.

We have contemplated the grand idea which Zacharias, full of the Holy Ghost, hath taught

us to conceive of Christ. He is the Horn of salvation; the principal subject of all prophecy; the only hope of the fathers and the faithful before his incarnation; the Deliverer of them, and all his people, out of the hands of their enemies, through the virtue of his life, death, and mediation, according to the promise, covenant, and oath of Jehovah.

After so complete a display of the adorable plan of salvation, Zacharias, still under the same unerring direction, turns his eyes upon his own son, a new-born infant. Faith, adoration of the Divine goodness, and holy joy, light up his aged, venerable countenance, whilst he fixes the attention of the church upon his illustrious offspring as the immediate forerunner of the Messiah, and the first preacher of the glories of his name, after his manifestation in the flesh.

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

The conclusion of this prophecy naturally leads us to consider the character and mission

of the Baptist; the doctrine he preached, his address, and the effect of the whole upon his hearers.

The Lord testifies of him, that "among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist," Matt. xi. 11. Marvellous are the things related concerning him. Like Isaac, he derived his existence from a miracle. His appearance, office, and spirit, were delineated many ages previous to his birth. An angel was sent down from heaven, immediately before Elisabeth conceived him, to notify this event was at hand, to declare his sanctification from the womb, and the great success which should attend his ministry. No person, excepting the Saviour himself, was ever so greatly distinguished. Yet the glory thrown round the Baptist by these things, was designed to draw upon him the eyes of all the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem, that the record he gave of Christ might spread the wider, and sink the deeper into the minds of men.

After having lived under the tuition of the best of parents; after employing himself, as we must conclude, in meditation and prayer, and in the contemplation of God, and intimate communion with him, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his birth; after this fit preparation for his future high employment,—

when he was near thirty years of age, the word of God, probably an audible voice, such as Samuel and the prophets used to hear, came to John. For this he waited, not presuming to enter upon the ministry at the impulse of his own inclination or zeal. This was his authentic appointment, and the seal of his mission, which was to declare that the promised Messiah, now standing in the midst of them, was come immediately to erect a spiritual, everlasting kingdom. To prepare them for admission into it, was the business on which he himself was sent.

The Baptist's habit was quite rustic, resembling that of the ancient prophets, made of camels' hair, bound round him with a leathern girdle. His fare was coarse, such as the poorest of the people ate, locusts and wild honey. So seldom did he join in social meetings, so great a lover was he of retirement, and engaged with such ardour in his sacred employ, that the pleasure-loving world said, he had a devil; that is, was a mope, and mad with religion. Yet far from assuming at all upon the sanctity of his life, he was clothed with humility, comparing himself to a voice, which after it conveys the speaker's mind, has no being. Herod, though a prince—a prince enslaved to lewdness, a prince hardened in villany—could not resist the impression of the

Baptist's life. He was forced for a time to fear John, whom all men knew to be a prophet, and to be himself a holy man and a just. Even the Searcher of hearts declared, that whilst his doctrine imparted Divine knowledge, his life was a flame of affection to God and men; "He was a burning and a shining light," John v. 35.

Thus furnished in the richest manner for his office, by the grace and gifts of the Holy Ghost, the child of Zacharias, "the prophet of the Highest, goes before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."

The angel had affirmed as much. "Many of the children of Israel," said Gabriel, "shall he turn to the Lord their God; and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord," Luke i. 16, 17. Here it is plain, that the Lord, the God of the children of Israel, and the Highest, signify the same individual person. But these names the inspired writers never give to any but the true God. If, then, they are actually given unto Christ, the scripture compels us to confess, he is the most high God, the Lord God of Israel; consequently one with the Father. That these names are given to him is undeniable; for He

before whose face John was to go, the angel calls the Lord God; Zacharias calls the Highest, and the Lord :—but, according to John's confession, and as the event proves, he did not go before the face of the Father, but of Christ. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me, shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire," Matt. iii. 11.

Immediately before Christ, John was to go, "to prepare his ways."

When an earthly monarch begins his march to take possession of a capital city, won by his arms, or descending to him by inheritance, his troops go before to remove every obstacle in the road. The steep hills they level; the low places they fill up; the circling path they make straight; the craggy places plain. All this labour is absolutely needful, when the way leads through a desert. In the prophetic style, the mind of man, in its natural state, is this desert; a dreary, rocky waste, without one cultivated field or fruitful tree to cheer the eye. In such a state the jews notoriously were, when the Lord God came to his people. Gross ignorance, pride, superstition, and infidelity, blocked up the way of the Prince of peace into their hearts; and rooted prejudices from self-love, like mountains and rocks, forbad his success. To remove them all, John

was sent immediately before his face. And if we survey the spiritual state of the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem at this time, and the doctrine the Baptist preached, we shall see the very same obstructions, which prevail in all places and times against the reception of Christ, with the only effectual method to remove them in any degree.

When the Lord came to his temple at Jerusalem, the party of greatest name for religion and authority were the pharisees; of whom there were two sorts. The first were zealous, from a principle of conscience, for all the ceremonies of the law, and traditions of the elders; paying an external obedience to the commandments of God, and taking much pains to save their souls. It is evident this must have been their character, from the high respect they obtained; from the pharisee described by our Lord in the parable; from St. Paul's manner of life before his conversion; from the testimony he bears to many of them, that they were like himself, having a zeal for God; and from our Saviour's declaration, that in putting his apostles to death, "they would think they did God service."

Yet with all this form of godliness, they were sitting in darkness, and the shadow of death, far from the way of peace. They neither knew Christ, nor the Father; themselves,

nor the evil of sin; neither the perfection, use, and end of the eternal law published from mount Sinai, nor the meaning of their sacrifices, nor the spirit of their own religion. They were virtuous in their own eyes, trusted in themselves as righteous, and despised others. They imagined they had no need of any better righteousness in the sight of God, to obtain the remission of their sins, than what was to be found in their conformity to the letter of the commandment. And of this strictly religious character, were the fiercest opposers of the doctrines of Christ, his persecutors and murderers; of this character was the apostle Paul, before his conversion, set on fire of hell, yet verily thinking he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus," Acts xxvi. 9.

But though these sincere pharisees were thus grossly ignorant, they were conceited of their knowledge. With infinite disdain, they asked the Teacher from heaven, "Are we blind also?" John ix. 40. Add to this, they were elated in common with all the jews, on account of their descent from Abraham, their covenant of circumcision, and separation from the gentiles, as the peculiar people of God.

What a shock to every one of their prejudices, what a bold attack upon all their favourite errors, was the preaching of the Bap-

tist! What a preparation to make the hearers who believed his word see their need of the Saviour, and depend upon him wholly! For John preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; telling them, that all, without difference, must submit to this ordinance; publicly confessing themselves sinners, extremely polluted, and no longer go about to justify themselves. That not a temporal conqueror, but a kingdom of Divine original and spiritual nature, "the kingdom of God, was at hand," Mark i. 15; of which the two grand blessings were, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. That the law, their boast, was the ministration of death; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is above all; into whose hands all things are given: the Light of the world, the Bridegroom of the church, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world: on whom whosoever believeth hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him, 2 Cor. iii. 10; John i. 17; viii. 12; i. 29; iii. 36.

This clear, full, sublime testimony to Christ, the Baptist published, and so fulfilled the prophecy of his father Zacharias concerning him. "To give knowledge of salvation" to the people of God; not by works of righteousness which men can do, but by the full forgiveness

of their immense and dreadful debt, "by the remission of their sins;" a remission proceeding from "the tender mercy of our God," yet not exercised towards them but through the mediation of "the Day-spring from on high," Christ Jesus; distinguished by this title, because every communication of Divine knowledge comes from Him: "No man knoweth who the Father is, but he to whom the Son will reveal him," Luke x. 22; without whose teaching, darkness rests upon the mind as deep shades of night cover the earth, till the beams of opening day give life to its inhabitants. And till Christ gives this light, men sit in darkness and the shadow of death, condemned prisoners; and by Him alone are their feet guided into the way of peace, of reconciliation with God, peace of conscience, and peace with all men.

Behold the sum and substance of the gospel, proclaimed at once by this messenger, who goes "before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways!" Behold, an abridgment of the whole that Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John, and every faithful successor of theirs in the ministry, have preached to this hour; Christ the light, the atonement, and all the salvation of his people! What a perfect contrast was this to the religion of the best sort of the pharisees, though bad were the best!

With these were mixed a large number of hypocrites; pharisees who did all to be seen of men; or still worse, covered the most villanous practices with a cloak of sanctity;—strict in observing the traditions and ceremonies of religion, fasting, and for a pretence making long prayers; whilst they totally neglected justice, mercy, and the love of God, and even devoured widows' houses, Matt. xxiii. 14.

Besides these hypocrites, yet of no better character, were the sadducees, who believed neither the resurrection, nor the existence of angel or spirit; looking upon religion only as a fit instrument to carry on civil government.

When many of these (excited by the religious novelty of a man so famous, in the habit and character of an ancient prophet) came to hear the Baptist, and some of them approached, desirous, as it seems, of being baptized, he immediately turns and addresses them. He joins the pharisees and sadducees, in principle totally opposite, as confederates together, and openly brands them both as "a generation of vipers," full of the deadly poison of hypocrisy, malice, and error. He expresses his wonder that any so hardened as they were, should at all regard his preaching, begin to take warning, and be willing to submit to his baptism. Guarding them, therefore, against their gross hypocrisy and false confidences, he

calls upon them to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire," Matt. iii. 7—10; that is, the final destruction of all destitute of faith in Christ, and holiness the fruit of faith, is at hand, and as certain as if already executed.

Besides these pharisees, sadducees, and hypocrites, there were multitudes of the poor people, and many publicans, (or taxgatherers,) men of the most abandoned lives, who belonged to no sect. These heard the Baptist to good effect, and justified God, being baptized of him; whilst the pharisees and lawyers (or teachers of the law) rejected the counsel of God against themselves, and were not baptized.

To this company, as appears by comparing Mark i. 5—8, with Luke iii. 10—18, he spake thus:

"I, upon your profession of repentance, baptize you with water unto repentance, as I have authority from God to do; and by the same authority I threaten impenitent sinners with eternal vengeance; and this is all I can do. 'But he that cometh after me is mightier

than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost,' which shall be given to all them that believe on his name, 'and with fire;* whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat,' his faithful people, 'into the garner: but he will burn up the chaff,' all empty professors of his religion, 'with unquenchable fire.'" And when these, his hearers, who had repented, and were baptized, confessing their sins, and looking for Him that was to come, doubted whether they might continue in their respective callings, be soldiers and publicans still; and asked him therefore with great concern, what they should do? he taught them that they might serve God in any station acceptably, by renouncing all those sins, to which from their way of life they were exposed, and by dwelling in love with all their fellow-creatures.

Such doctrine the Baptist preached. His manner of teaching was with power; not like a lecturer on morals defining duty, and then leaving the important matter there. No, he enforced all he taught by the authority of the Lord God; by an alarming address to every

* That is, "fiery trials." See Luke xii. 49, 50; Mark x. 38, 39. And after the word, fire, the fan is added, or the sifting, which the faithful preaching of the gospel produces as the explication of the word, fire.

man's conscience, in his sight; dividing and distinguishing his hearers, according to their peculiar character and state of soul; giving to each his proper instruction, and fixing the attention of all upon the separating fan, the axe of almighty vengeance, the unquenchable fire.

His manner of delivery perfectly agreed with the solemnity of his subject, and added great force to it. It was zealous, vehement, loud, and bold; formed to possess in a moment every hearer with conviction, that he felt the truth of all he taught; had nothing at heart, but to see it succeed in the conversion of sinners to God; fearing no consequences which might follow respecting himself, from delivering it without concealment or palliation.

The effect of the whole upon the vast concourse of his hearers was admirable. Many of the most notorious offenders, harlots and publicans, our Lord tells us, heard his word, believed, and repented. Many dejected mourners for sin were comforted; the poor amongst the people were rejoiced. Some of the haughty pharisees, hypocrites, and sadducees were Divinely changed. Their mistakes appeared fatal, their danger imminent, the glory of Christ conspicuous and captivating.

Such success, we are certain, must attend

the Baptist's labours, because the angel declared that "he should turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and the hearts of the fathers to the children;" putting an end, wherever his word took place, to those bitter quarrels, which are so frequently found between nearest relations.

Such glorious success must accompany the Baptist's preaching to vast multitudes, since Zacharias, full of the Holy Ghost, declared, that "he should give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins; light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death."

This success put an honour upon the first publication of the gospel, and was a specimen of its Divine efficacy, which to the end of time is God's appointed means of bringing salvation to the lost.

Indefatigable in these labours of love the Baptist remained, till the lewd Herodias instigated Herod to cast him into prison. And, perceiving the uneasy impressions John's faithful condemnation of their abominable commerce left upon Herod's mind, her cruel jealousy never slept, till John was beheaded. Thus, like the prophets of old, "who spake in the name of the Lord," the Baptist suffered a violent death for discharging his office and his conscience. In the mysterious course of

providence, a bloody tyrant is suffered, at the instigation of an adulteress, to put an end to the inestimable labours of one of the most excellent witnesses for God, in the very prime of his days and height of his usefulness; leaving upon record this fact, that the greatest honour which can be conferred on those in whom the Lord most delights, is, power to stand forth before his enemies with such boldness as to incur their resentment, and persecution even unto death.

CHAPTER XXVII.

On the Divinity of Christ.

THE doctrine of this prophecy proves their fatal error, who degrade Christ into a man like ourselves, or esteem him less than very God; for Gabriel calls him the Lord God of Israel; and Zacharias, the Lord, the Highest. His history, from his conception to the full establishment of his church, affords abundant evidence that he is so.

Waving, therefore, many sufficient proofs, more commonly urged as a scriptural foundation for this great article of our faith, I shall confine myself to his history: from thence

proving, that all the circumstances respecting his birth, life, and death, are perfectly consistent, if Christ be very God; all strange and preposterous, to the last degree, supposing him to be in his nature infinitely inferior.

After having been for near four thousand years the principal subject of all prophecy, in the fulness of time Christ is conceived of the blessed virgin, by the overshadowing power of the Holy Ghost. Soon after Mary goes to salute her cousin Elisabeth. "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb. And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, and said, Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Luke i. 41—43. The solemnity of the occasion, and the person dictating this question to Elisabeth, makes it the more memorable and weighty. If by the expression *my* Lord, Elisabeth meant only a man like ourselves, how was it any condescension, that her near relation, the mother of one mere man, should come to salute the mother of another mere man? But if Mary was really the mother of Elisabeth's Lord and Maker according to the flesh, there was then cause sufficient for all her admiration.

The circumstances of the birth of Christ strongly prove this was the truth. For it is honoured and distinguished by prodigies of

the noblest kind, to which nothing was ever seen in the least degree similar. A new luminary, called his star, shines in the firmament, appointed to be the miraculous conductor of the eastern sages to the place where the Child lay, that they might come and worship him. Who is no sooner born, than the angel appears to the shepherds, near Bethlehem, saying unto them, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," Luke ii. 10, 11. Instantly, at the mention of this Divine title, there was with him "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God," and expressing in their hymn the grand effects of the incarnation; "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men," ver. 14.

We read of no mark of distinction of this kind ever attending the birth of a mere mortal. Not Abraham's, though the father of the faithful; not the birth of Moses, though he was the mouth of God to Israel, and their deliverer out of Egypt; not of Paul, though an inestimable benefactor of the gentile world. Each of these stand amongst the first of mere men; yet was their birth unnoticed by any, save the little circle of eye-witnesses to the event. But "when He bringeth in the First-

begotten Son into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him," Heb. i. 6.

Here again every thing is preposterous, if he whom all the angels were to worship, was more inferior to them in nature, than the most stupid peasant is to Solomon in wisdom. And with what truth could Gabriel call the infant Jesus, the Lord; or how could he be the object of Divine adoration at his birth, being no more than a man like ourselves.

Further, the history of Christ proves that he did the works which are ascribed to God alone; which none of his messengers, though empowered to work miracles without number, ever did; that he spoke of himself in terms which it were blasphemy for any but God to use; that the rays of Divinity shone forth in his death; and that he did receive on earth, and still receives in heaven, the worship due to God only. Can he then be less than the true God?

For instance: power over the winds and seas was never exercised by any mere man. This is alleged in the Old Testament, as a decisive proof that the God of the jews was the Almighty. "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them," Psa. lxxxix. 8, 9. "For

he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still: then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven," Psa. cvii. 25—30.

A more majestic description of almighty power cannot be found. Yet this very scripture, without altering a syllable, relates a fact which passed between Jesus and his disciples. A violent storm arises, the waves of the sea are lifted up: his disciples are ready to perish, for the ship was beginning to sink. They call not upon the Father, but upon Christ; not to pray for their deliverance, but to save them himself. He hears their cry, and rebukes the wind. "He said unto the sea, Peace, be still; and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm," Mark iv. 39. Now, if uncontróllable dominion over the winds and waves be, in the Old Testament, a demonstration that the God of the jews was the Almighty; the same uncontrollable dominion, exercised by

Christ in the most God-like manner, when invoked as alone able to save, must prove, with equal force, that he is the Almighty also, one with the Father.

Again: we find, that spreading out the heavens alone, and treading upon the waves of the sea, are joined together as equal acts of almighty power, peculiar to God. Now, turn to Mark vi. 48—50. There you read that, when the disciples were "toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them; and about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus cometh unto them, walking on the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out; for they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them," by which they must know who it was. After this he saith unto them, "Be of good cheer; Εγω ειμι, I am he; be not afraid." Here, in the very exercise of an act, declared in scripture to appertain to God alone, he calls himself Jehovah; for "I am he," means no less, as shall presently be proved.

Should it be said, no works wrought by Christ can ever oblige us to conclude he was the true God, because he says, "The Son can do nothing of himself," John v. 19; and prays to the Father, when he raised up Lazarus from the grave. I answer: it would have been

impossible, without these declarations, for us to have believed there was any distinction of persons in the Divine nature, as we are taught to do; or the subjection of Christ, in his offices of Servant and Mediator, to which he humbled himself, as the prophets foretold. Being, therefore, very God, and very man, in one Christ, he could not, consistently with his own character, but speak at different times in a style proper to both. The church of Christ, therefore, can perfectly reconcile this apparent contradiction, and all passages in holy writ, which express his inferiority to the Father, and entire dependence upon him; for this belongs to his character as very man and Mediator. But, upon supposition that Christ is less than very God, no vindication can be admitted for his ever using the style of God, when he speaks of himself. Wisdom, goodness, modesty, and truth, all require that creatures should, with a sacred dread, abstain from every thing tending to confound themselves with their Creator. But Jesus does the very reverse. Hear him vindicate himself, when accused of polluting the sabbath: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," John v. 17. See the sign he gives, upon the jews requiring one of him, as his authority for driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple: "Destroy this temple, (pointing to his

own body,) and in three days I will raise it up," John ii. 19. Hear him foretelling the victory of his cross: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," John xii. 32.

But above all observe, Christ frequently calls himself JEHOVAH, or *I am He*. That this expression signifies JEHOVAH cannot be doubted; for it means self-existence, and is very often used to denote the supreme Majesty of heaven and earth. Thus, "See now that I, even *I, am He*, and there is no god with me," Deut. xxxii. 39. "Thou art the same," Psa. cii. 27; (in hebrew, *Thou art He.*) And this title is here given immediately after the creation of heaven and earth has been ascribed to God. In Isa. xli. 4, "I the Lord the first, and with the last, *I am He.*" Many other passages might be cited. But these sufficiently prove, that the jews were taught from holy writ to understand, that this grand appellation, *I am He*, expressing necessary existence, belonged only to the Creator of all things. But this very appellation Christ himself assumes, as his own proper name. Discovering to the apostles the almost incredible treachery of Judas in betraying him, "Now I tell you," says he, "before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe" (that is, from this instance of my omniscience) "that *I am He*," John xiii. 19. When the jews were

enraged at his asserting his own existence before Abraham, he inflames their rising indignation against himself to the utmost height, by affirming, with a kind of oath, his supreme Divinity: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am," John viii. 58; or, *I am He.* A truth of such absolute necessity to be received, that he tells his adversaries, "If ye believe not that *I am He*, ye shall die in your sins," ver. 24.

How, then, could the jews do less than they did, regarding Jesus only as a man? They heard him repeatedly affirm, I am the Lord God. I solemnly assure you, "*I am He.* I again tell you, that if you do not believe that *I am He*, ye shall die in your sins." God had given them a law against blasphemers and false prophets, commanding that they should be put to death by stoning. Supposing, therefore, Jesus was a mere man, it was their bounden duty to stone him to death for these sayings, as we know they often attempted to do. And as it is the bounden duty of those who arrogate to themselves the title of rational christians, chiefly for agreeing with jews in denying the proper Divinity of Christ, and with jews brand his church as idolaters for worshipping him; it is their bounden duty, I say, if they believe God abhors idolatry, with them to call Jesus accursed; when they read

in his authentic history that he takes to himself the incommunicable name of Jehovah—*I am He.*

This supposed blasphemy was the cause of his death. For when "the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? Jesus said, I am," or I am He:—"and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death," Mark xiv. 61—64.

And now see how they gather round his cross, casting barbarous insults on him in his agonies, and triumphing over his agonies. Behold his face, more marred than any man's, and his body ploughed up with long furrows, by the scourging he endured! Hear that loud and bitter cry, as of one sinking under inexpressible horrors of mind, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt. xxvii. 46. Still the union of the Divine and human natures never appeared more incontestable than in the midst of all this shocking scene:—for a ruffian, upon his own confession deserving the death he suffered, calls upon Jesus to remember him. He instantly receives from Jesus an assurance of immediate everlasting

happiness. Who can deliver after this manner but God alone? Take off the veil which hides from the eye of sense and unenlightened reason the transaction which passed on the cross, and you will perceive that Jesus appeared in no instance of his life so glorious as when he hung a spectacle to men and angels on the accursed tree. Then his death destroyed death, and him that had the power of it, Heb. ii. 14. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so was the Son of man lifted up," John iii. 14; bound only by the cords of love, for the healing of the nations. His precious blood, which bathed his body, flowed "a fountain for sin, and for all uncleanness," Zech. xiii. 1; of which the growing virtue, and the growing praise, shall fill with wonder and joy all heaven for ever.

Can such beneficent effects be ascribed to the blood of a mere man? or can the death of one innocent creature be the atonement for the sins of innumerable myriads, and the everlasting salvation of all who escape the wrath to come? The things constantly asserted in holy writ of the efficacy of Christ's death are beyond all proportion, without supposing the blood of Christ, which purchased the church, was indeed the blood of God.

Nor during his unexampled humiliation were proofs of his eternal Godhead wanting. Above,

below, on every side, whilst he hangs on the cross, the whole frame of nature was violently disturbed. Darkness at noon-day covers all the earth for three hours. The sun itself is darkened, not by an interposing planet, but by a miracle. The earth quakes, and with the veil of the temple the rocks are rent. What manner of proportion is there between such awful and grand prodigies as these, and the death of a mere innocent man? Did ever martyred prophet or apostle receive any degree of such honour in their dying hours? What aileth thee, O thou earth, that thou wert moved, and thou sun, that thou refusedst to shine? We can answer, Tremble not at the presence only, but at the crucifixion of your Maker. In this loud and terrifying manner publish the detestation due to the atrocious deed; and when the God of nature suffers, let the whole inanimate creation express its sympathy with him.

Having been crucified by the scribes and pharisees, for asserting his equality with the Father; after his resurrection, instead of refusing as sacrilege, he openly receives the adoration due to God only. Thomas, upon hearing Jesus declare to him all his thoughts, and stubborn unbelief of heart concerning his resurrection, said unto him, "My Lord and my God." At his ascension all his disciples

worship him. Soon after, Stephen is stoned, invoking and saying, " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," Acts vii. 59, 60. Here a martyr, beholding " the heavens opened, and Jesus at the right hand of God," prays to him alone for the two greatest gifts which can be received; the salvation of his own soul, and the pardon of the worst murderers under heaven. Yet this very martyr, if Christ be not by nature God, with the Father, dies in the very act of idolatry; therefore, according to express scripture, " can never enter into the kingdom of heaven." This is but one amongst a thousand glaring absurdities, which inevitably follow from degrading the Saviour into a mere man or a creature.

From this time, and no wonder, we find the churches of Christ constantly distinguished by the very practice of the first martyr, by their calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. And calling upon God, we know, is the Old Testament phrase for worshipping him. When more than sixty years had passed from his ascension, St. John is favoured with a visit from his best and dearest Friend. So glorious was the sight, that he fell at his feet as dead. " And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me," (observe, he takes to him-

self the style of the Supreme,) "Fear not; I am the first and the last: *I am he that liveth*, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death," Rev. i. 17, 18. And to finish the whole account, the throne of God and the Lamb are joined together, as receiving the everlasting adoration of all the company of heaven. Thus the oracles of God deliver down the character of Christ to all ages.

But how contrary to every idea of wisdom, goodness, and propriety, is this history of Christ, if he be no more than a man or a creature! Why, then, at his birth, is he called the Lord? Why does he do the works of God in the manner of God? Why speak the language which appertains to God only? Why in his death receive attestation to his innocence from the whole inanimate creation? Why, after his resurrection, receive worship as God from Thomas, from all his disciples, from all the churches, from saints and angels in heaven?

So interwoven is this grand article of the christian creed in the whole scheme of scriptural religion, that you demolish it all, as soon as you degrade Christ into a mere man, or a creature. For immediately our natural condition and character, sinful and corrupt in that degree the scriptures describe it, must be denied; our obligations to love, obey, and

trust God, must be diminished exceedingly; our estimate of the nature and demerit of sin, of the Divine displeasure against it, of the perfections of God, and the way in which eternal life is to be attained, must be totally different from what the church of Christ hath ever believed. Immediately we must see great reason to be offended at many things which Christ spoke, and many strong passages in scripture, which nothing but the utmost violence of interpretation can pervert from testifying to his supreme Divinity. And, if we are true to our principles, and men of thought, we shall very soon be involved in the utmost perplexity, to account for this greatest of all mysteries, how the christian church, with the apostles at the head of it, were all suffered to fall into idolatry; to continue in the abominable worship of a mere man, or creature, with the worship due only to the supreme God. This is a strong objection against the Revealer himself; and will lead to a contempt of christianity. For what great good has it done? Jews and turks, not christians, are the true worshippers, according to their scheme who deny the Son. And the crime of the jews in calling Christ, if but a mere man, though a true prophet, accursed; or of the turks, in setting aside his gospel, because they, think it exceedingly corrupted, is as nothing,

compared to the universal idolatry of the christian church in adoring Christ, as " over all, God blessed for ever," Rom. ix. 5. For those who thus worship him must be, in their eyes who deny him to be very God, idolaters. And they in ours, enemies to the cross of Christ, blasphemers of his adorable name, and subverters of his holy religion.

So far, therefore, is it from being, as many most falsely assert, a point of speculation in divinity, what we believe concerning the character and nature of Christ, that not one article in the whole compass of religion is of equal importance. And if there be any one point of faith more characteristic of the christian church than another, it is this, that Jesus Christ " is the true God, and eternal life," 1 John v. 20.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

On Contempt of Preaching.

THE great utility of the Baptist's ministry, predicted in this prophecy, proves their mistake, who undervalue the preaching of the gospel. For allowing both the mission and endowments of the Baptist and the apostles

were in several respects extraordinary, still all ministers whom Christ sends, are, as they were, appointed to "give light to them that sit in darkness, and to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." They are also furnished with qualifications for this office, and have assurance of success, in some measure, as the Baptist and apostles had in a superabundant degree.

The proof of these assertions should animate every faithful pastor with confident expectation of saving the souls of men; and convince those who disparage this mode of spreading divine knowledge, that they greatly err, and offend God.

All preachers, sent by Christ, it was said, are appointed to the same kind of work, as the Baptist and apostles were. Read the institution of the ministerial office. You must confess it to be one and the same in every age: for "when the Lord ascended up on high, after leading captivity captive," he, to perpetuate the benefits of his glorious triumph, "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto

the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," Ephes. iv. 11—13.

To secure these grand purposes, the christian ministry was at first instituted; and, as the terms necessarily import, must be exercised, so long as Christ has a church upon earth. But in this institution, the extraordinary officers of the church are appointed to the very same spiritual employment. Neither the splendid gifts peculiar to the apostles, prophets, and evangelists; nor their unequalled extent of usefulness, prevent a perfect equality in this respect. They are all set apart to preach Christ, and call sinners to repentance, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in him," Acts xxvi. 18; for this is the work of the ministry. They are all set apart "for the perfecting of the saints," by cementing them together in the unity of the faith,—"and for the edifying the body of Christ," that is, promoting their obedience, and increasing their comfort by more full discoveries of the counsel of God, till they enter into glory.

But on the supposition, that the pastors and teachers whom Christ sends, can ever cease to be useful in this most beneficent manner, then his gift to the church must become of no value. Then either the conversion

of sinners, and advancement of the faithful in spiritual life, must entirely cease, or be produced and maintained by other means than the Saviour ordained for this purpose; which would at once impeach his veracity, and cast contempt on his own appointment; a case which cannot be supposed. Consequently, the being and well-being of the church, in all ages, must depend upon the instrumentality of those officers, whom the Lord intrusts with the treasure of his gospel, and makes "rulers over his household, to give them meat in due season," Matt. xxiv. 45.

The origin, therefore, of the christian preacher's office is Divine, and its design most beneficent to men. Proper qualifications, also, are always found in those whom Christ puts into this office. The inspired epistles to Timothy and Titus, specify that knowledge and love of the truth, that facility to explain and prove it to others, that exemplary behaviour and sanctity of character, are indispensably required in this holy profession. These qualifications are Divine credentials, which visibly distinguish the men whom the Lord has been pleased to call, choose, and appoint to this office. Without these qualifications, preachers thrust themselves by human ordination into the ministry to get bread, or from vile ambition to gain preferment and power in the church.

From the possession of these qualifications, common to all teachers whom Christ sends, they must harmonize with the apostles in the unity of the faith. There can be no disagreement amongst them in essentials; because they are all taught of God, out of the same scriptures, to lay the same foundation, to build the same superstructure, to give the same account of the fall, the redemption, the world, and the church.

Thus the qualified teachers, whom Christ sends, have seals to their ministry, and turn some to righteousness: because the Lord, in honour of his truth, for encouragement of his servants, and in love to his people, has decreed this shall be the certain consequence of preaching his word. In one passage, he compares its operation to the influence of snow and rain, "which come down from heaven, and return not thither, but give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;" declaring, "his word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he please, and prosper in the thing whereto he sent it." But he sends it for the justification, conversion, and everlasting salvation of men: which he expresses under the following beautiful imagery: "For ye" (by whom this word is received) "shall go out" (of your natural state of guilt, condemnation, and slavery to sin)

"with joy, and be led forth" (in the good ways of the Lord) "with peace.—Instead of the thorn," (fit emblem of sinners, altogether unprofitable,) "shall come up the" useful, stately "fir tree," well representing the excellent of the earth; and "instead of the brier" (despicable men, vexing all about them, whose end is to be burned) "shall come up the" beautiful, sweet-scented "myrtle tree," (emblem of peaceful, amiable believers:) "and it" (this Divine transformation) "shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign" (of the efficacy of his word preached) "that shall not be cut off," Isa. lv. 10—13.

In another passage, applicable to the times of the gospel, (for Jeremiah says, "what is there spoken, shall be considered in the latter days,") the Almighty accuses false teachers of running before they are sent; of prophesying, before he had spoken to them; of telling dreams and lies, and causing the people to err. After this heavy charge, he points out the method they should have taken to succeed:—"But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. Let him that hath my word, speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord;

and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Jer. xxiii. 22, 28, 29. How can we avoid concluding from these declarations, that some degree of success must accompany the faithful preaching of God's word? Did not St. Paul conclude thus, when he charged Timothy "to take heed to himself, and to his doctrine;" assuring him, that by so doing, he "should save himself, and those that heard him?" 1 Tim. iv. 16. Did he not conclude thus, when he determined to rejoice that Christ was preached, though it was from the basest motives, from envy, strife, and malevolence against himself? Phil. i. 15—18. No other reason can be given for this determination, than the certainty there is of success in some degree from preaching that "name which is above every name."

Should it be said, that Christ himself "stretched forth his hands all the day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people," Rom. x. 21; that the apostle cried out, "Who hath believed our report?" Rom. x. 16. I grant they did. Yet how many thousands were saved by their labours! How many churches were planted! The case is still the same. Much good upon the whole is done by pastors and teachers whom Christ sends, notwithstanding the vast majority excuse themselves from receiving their doctrine, and either hate or despise it. Still, in the language of the

parable which describes this matter, "the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, the outcasts in the highways and hedges;" that is, many of the helpless, the afflicted, and the most guilty, will be brought in to feast at the supper. Faithful, scriptural representations of our natural state; of the qualities and desert of sin; of the person, sufferings, love, and triumph of Christ in the redemption of his church; of the grace, mercy, and peace enjoyed through believing in his name, never fail of producing, in some measure, an effect worthy of God, and becoming the publication of his own word; which he calls the good seed bringing forth good fruits, in "some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold," Matt. xiii. 8; the truth that sanctifies, and makes the soul free indeed.

Every faithful preacher, therefore, of this word, should be importunate with his Lord, to grant him to see it made the instrument more and more of turning men from the error of their way: should boldly plead the Divine institution of his office, its beneficent design, his call to it, and the promise of success, till the most Mighty girds his sword upon his thigh, and rides on conquering in favour of the word of truth, meekness, and righteousness, Psa. xlv. 3, 4. What are insatiable love of sin, sottish ignorance, pride, and unbelief, with

all their visible and invisible abettors, before this rod of his power? The word of the truth of the gospel we read of old, brought forth fruit in all the world. Has it lost its Divine efficacy in a course of years? No more than the sun its light or heat; for "His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him," Psa. lxxii. 17, who is the great subject of the gospel.

How groundless then is the common plea used to disparage the utility of preaching Christ:—"We know already as much as we can be told. Church prayers and reading the scriptures are sufficient. It signifies very little what is preached. We do our duty when we worship God. The vulgar only need to be taught."

Most absurd and false! For the prayers of the church are seldom used aright, or the scripture understood, till faithful preaching has enlightened the mind. And the reason is plain:—We are naturally averse to come any further under the power of religion, than is consistent with great indulgence to pride and self-will. Hence we exalt customary forms of devotion in secret, regular attendance upon public worship, external and partial obedience, as sufficient, and grow secure in the practice of these things. A zealous attack,

therefore, upon this favourite error, by the ministers of Christ, is the way God generally is pleased to use for its detection and overthrow. Thus in the jewish church, they had the oracles, the covenants, and the service of God. Of these they made their boast, and from day to day attended upon the worship of God. But it was in hypocrisy, ignorance, and great wickedness, that they worshipped him, not "in spirit and in truth." With all the advantages for the knowledge of God in their hands, and in the constant use of the means of grace, they were still "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." And those who received the light of life, did not receive it principally from reading the scriptures, to which they had been accustomed from their childhood, nor from the temple service, which they had always attended; but from the Baptist's ministry. His alarming denunciations of the wrath to come, against all who trusted in themselves as righteous; his full and glorious testimony to the Lamb of God; dispelled the mists and darkness, which till then had covered their minds; though he spoke only what Moses, the psalms, and the prophets contained.

The very same instrument, namely, the faithful preaching of his word, God is pleased, as appears from history, and matter of fact

passing before our eyes, to make use of in every age, when "he gives knowledge of salvation to his people." Faithful preaching manifests the difference between nominal and real christians; between barren assent to scripture doctrines, and the faith of God's elect; between external obedience, and spiritual life; between honouring Christ with all his titles, from mere influence of education, and cleaving to him from real want and knowledge of his excellency.

Despise not then prophesying. It is eminently the channel by which God has chosen to convey his grace to the children of men. Do not fancy liberal education, learning, honesty, or the practice of devotion, set you above reaping much advantage for your soul, from pastors whom Christ has really called, qualified, and sent into his vineyard. Consider, that from the beginning it was his manner to send his disciples before him, whithersoever he himself would come; and his command to all, who long for the salvation of men, is, to "pray the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest," Matt. ix. 38. Remember the ethiopian eunuch, with all his piety, understood not the scripture he was so devoutly reading, nor the way of life, till Philip was sent to preach Christ unto him; nor Cornelius, till Peter

told him "words, whereby he might be saved." How could the excellent advantages which faithful preaching produces be rendered more conspicuous, or greater honour be put upon the office?

CHAPTER XXIX.

On the connexion between Christian Doctrine and Good Works.

THE prophecy of Zacharias, by being full of the peculiar principles of christianity, proves it is a great mistake to press the practice of good works in neglect of christian doctrine. Yet how many zealously contend, that men should only be taught to be sober, peaceable, and kind in their families; to "do justice, love mercy," and attend upon the worship of God, believing the christian religion is from heaven. But the scripture doctrine of innate depravity infecting every man, and of the law concluding all under sin, which are the ground-work of redemption; the glory of the Redeemer's person, work, and salvation; justification by faith in his name; the new covenant and oath of God; the witness and influence of the Holy Ghost; and "the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins;"—

These things, they suppose, are far above common comprehension; for which reason they ought not to be the topics of instruction from the pulpit: the best service you can do to men is to dwell only on plain and practical subjects.

This mistake has been long asserted with the greatest confidence, and much too easily credited. It is necessary, therefore, to expose its falsehood and many bad effects.

If christian doctrines then are to be passed over in silence, as above the level of common understandings, the most important part of the Bible must be of very little use. The most important part is that, doubtless, which hath something in the manner of its delivery peculiarly solemn; which all who hear are called upon to regard with particular attention; which Christ and his apostles repeat from the prophets, containing what can be known only by express revelation from God. Honoured with this high distinction are the christian doctrines. For instance, that the Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head, Gen. iii. 15; that the Child born to us, is the mighty God; the Deliverer of his people; the Propitiation for sin; the alone Mediator between God and man; a great and merciful High Priest; the universal Judge, in and through whom all who unfeignedly trust

in him shall be saved, and all who despise him shall perish. These great things have the highest mark of distinction put upon them, to make them project to our notice above the rest of scripture; for they are proclaimed with the utmost solemnity, and awfully introduced or concluded with "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this," Isa. ix. 7. They are repeated from the prophets by Christ and his apostles, and the greatest stress is laid upon receiving them. But if no formal proof, explanation, or recommendation of these great truths are to be offered; if the practice of universal righteousness only must be urged, all-important as they are, they will very soon be despised, or at least forgotten. For to what use will any man suppose they can serve, if their certainty, importance, or practical influence are never pressed upon the conscience by those whose office it is to do it? These doctrines have no place naturally in our minds, nor are they deducible from our own reasonings, since they spring only from the counsel of God. By the constant omission of them, therefore, on the one hand, and constant urging the practice of good works only, on the other, who can avoid concluding that good works may be well produced, independent of christian doctrine, and are sufficient to salvation; that the moral part of christianity is

only worthy of esteem; and all in the New Testament, as well as the Old, respecting Christ himself, (his example excepted,) may be passed over in silence, without offence to God or detriment to man? Thus the most important part of holy writ is made to appear insignificant.

This guilty neglect of christian doctrine, so dishonourable to the Bible, directly contradicts the judgment of Christ and his apostles. Had all the Saviour's sermons been like that on the mount, it might have been pretended, with some plausibility, that the whole design of the gospel revelation was to make men good, without regard to faith in any particular doctrines. But how very different from any thing contained in that divine discourse are many of his dictates? Does he not plainly teach the universal ruin of mankind in the fall, when he says, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost, and to give his life a ransom for many?" Luke xix. 10; Mark x. 45. Does he not mark our innate depravity in the strongest lines, by specifying the manifold iniquities which proceed out of the heart, as streams from their fountain-head, and defile the man? Does he not twice, with a kind of oath, assert the absolute necessity of our being born again of the Spirit, because in our first and natural state we are

all born after the flesh? Does he not, with the most solemn asseveration, declare, there is no life or salvation without eating his flesh, or drinking his blood? comparing himself, no less than six times in one chapter, to the manna which was the whole sustenance of Israel in the wilderness, John vi.

Besides, how very little in the gospel of St. John is delivered on plain, practical subjects, compared with what is there taught concerning Christ, his work, and salvation. Great part of that brief history is taken up in displaying his glory, as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; the Bread of God that came down from heaven; the Light of the world; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God; the good Shepherd, that giveth his life for the sheep," and preserves them from perishing, in spite of all their foes.

Now, as no glimpse of these sublime truths is seen in those parts of scripture which are only designed to inculcate moral practice, when we meet with assertions of them, they must be intended to teach us something very different from it, even the peculiar doctrines of the christian faith.

If the Saviour, then, before his crucifixion, when it was improper, for several reasons, to

speak too explicitly about the nature and efficacy of his own death, resurrection, and ascension, did yet by no means omit teaching much more than moral righteousness, no one can neglect these his sayings, without reproaching him as a solemn trifler for revealing things unnecessary to be known, and condemning that method of religious instruction which he in infinite wisdom adopted.

When the kingdom of Christ was set up after his ascension, the apostles also insist much more on the doctrines of faith than on the practice of good works. They perpetually teach that "Jesus was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins; that there is salvation in no other; that through this Man is preached the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." What are the Acts of the holy apostles more than an account of their travels from one city and country to another, to preach the kingdom of God, and the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with the effects their testimony produced; subjects certainly very different from justice, mercy, or the love of God, though the appointed means of leading men into the practice of those graces. The inspired epistles, addressed to men who

already believed the articles of the christian faith, are almost every one of them written on the same plan. They open with a grand, affecting account of the essential doctrines and blessings of the gospel; from whence, towards the conclusion, devotedness of heart to God, purity of manners, and the most exemplary obedience are pressed, not only as becoming their christian profession, but as fruits necessary to prove a real union with Christ. The long epistle to the Romans, and that to the Hebrews, is a system of divinity relating to Christ and his church, with an application of the whole to practice. Every one, by opening his Bible, may see these things for himself.

I observe, further, that these doctrines are not only often taught by Christ, but at full length explained and established by his apostles, and their excellent influence is expressly affirmed. Were they above common comprehension, or of a speculative nature, could the glory of delivering men from condemnation, and from slavery to sin, be ascribed to them? Yet to them this glory is ascribed when our Lord affirms, "The truth shall make you free," John viii. 32; and when he prays for his disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth," John xvii. 17. Would he himself say, that to the poor the gos-

pel is preached, Luke iv. 18; or St. James, that "God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith," Jam. ii. 5; or St. Paul, that "the things which are despised, and are not," (meaning the slaves who were bought and sold like cattle,) "hath God chosen, that Christ might be made of him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" to them? 1 Cor. i. 28. 30. Would these things be asserted if the peculiar doctrines of the gospel were above common comprehension? They must then work like a charm, and the lowest of the people become rich towards God, and wise, and holy, and be received into glory, without understanding the things preached to them, as the means of their salvation.

To positive assertions of the usefulness of these doctrines, an express command is added, to teach them constantly; which alone is sufficient to decide the point, and ought to be well considered by those, whom false, rash zeal for good works hurries into a criminal neglect of christian principles. St. Paul charges Titus to "declare with all authority," that it is "the grace of God that bringeth salvation," (not the law of works, which saith, He that doeth these things shall live by them,) "hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly,

in this present world," Tit. ii. 11, 12. He again charges Titus to "affirm constantly" the total corruption of human nature; free justification through the kindness and love of God our Saviour; regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; in order that "they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works," calling these doctrines "good and profitable unto men," Tit. iii. 8.*

* The mere sound of scripture words has been much abused to oppose their real meaning. This has happened remarkably in the text before us. Many urge it with the utmost confidence, as a command to dwell on the practice of good works; when, in fact, the text is a charge to all christian ministers to insist on man's wretched state before faith in Christ, and the rich mercy of God through him, for justification, regeneration, and eternal life. The inspired apostle first affirms the truth and certainty of these things, by calling the whole of this doctrine a faithful word. He then asserts their excellent influence, as the reason why they must be taught constantly; "That they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Here the conjunction ἵνα plainly proves that good works are produced by the constant teaching of these doctrines, not that pressing good works should be the constant subject of christian teaching. To confirm this sense of the passage the authority of great critics agrees with the context. Erasmus renders the verse, "Fidus sermo, et de his volo, ut confirmes, quo solliciti sint, ut bonis operibus presint." Junius and Tremellius, "Fidus est sermo, et in his volo, ut ita quoque confirmes eos, ut solliciti sint ad faciendum bona opera." Schoetgenius in Pasorem, ἵνα "propriè notat causam finalem." And the french versions render this con-

But how false is all this if they are above common comprehension! if a life acceptable to our Maker can be supported without their aid; or if only pressing upon men the necessity of moral practice be the most effectual way to produce good works!

Added to the guilt of opposing the judgment of Christ, and his apostles, and the express command to preach these doctrines, all who neglect them in zeal for pressing moral practice, are chargeable with defeating one grand end of the christian ministry, which is to expound the scripture. Our business is to collect the various testimonies scattered through the sacred volume, in order to prove

junction by "afin que." Indeed, the context will agree with no other sense. For, to give greater weight to the command, these things which Titus was charged to affirm constantly, are said "to be good and profitable unto men." Now to understand good works by these things, not the doctrines before named, will make the sense extremely flat, and the assertion absolutely needless; for who ever doubted whether good works were "good and profitable unto men?" But that these doctrines are so, the world hath in all ages vehemently denied, and reproached them as most unfriendly to virtuous practice. A Divine declaration, therefore, in their favour was highly necessary. Besides, the opposition between doctrines "good and profitable unto men," and vain and foolish questions, with the command to reject heretics, in the context, proves the inspired apostle is speaking of those doctrines only, which are highly instrumental in promoting christian practice, and not of christian practice itself.

more fully the capital truths of the christian faith, and throw a light and beauty upon many otherwise obscure parts, till the scripture itself becomes a book of great instruction, support, consolation, and delight, to the people. On the christian doctrines all the other parts of scripture have dependence, and a connexion with them as an exemplification of their truth; so that they serve, when understood, as a key to explain the whole which relates to spiritual life and godliness. But no lectures which confine our attention to the practice of moral righteousness only, can afford the least help to understand those scripture passages which want explanation. On the contrary, men learn to contract from this method a dislike to the Bible, for speaking so emphatically a language quite opposite to the sufficiency of good works, which they hear constantly extolled. When all share in the grand business of justifying a sinner before God is taken from works, and the whole glory ascribed to Christ; when supreme love of him, even to losing our life for his sake, is exacted with all authority, under penalty of being accursed and destroyed for ever, if we do not thus love him; and when so much stress is laid upon faith in him as the radical grace, from which alone all goodness can grow; these scriptures must be heard with jealousy

and great offence, after we have long been told, the stress of our salvation is to be laid on our own goodness, independent of any affection to a crucified Redeemer. At best, all scriptures of this import must appear strange and unintelligible. And when good works are thus laid as the ground of our hope towards God, the nature and desert of sin cannot be seen or believed, as the scripture represents them both; because in this case the best works we can perform are of no more weight against our guilt, than the genteel address of an assassin is to atone for his atrocious crimes. But slight thoughts of sin must cause the scriptures to appear greatly exceptionable; in denouncing the penalty of death as the wages of every transgression; in the judgment already executed upon offenders, which it records, and the tremendous doom reserved for them in the eternal world. These things will ever appear contrary to our ideas of goodness and justice, till we have greatly humbled ourselves before God, as creatures exceedingly guilty; which never will be effected by exalting the worth of our own duties.

After strong prejudices, therefore, against several parts of scripture, on these accounts, have brooded some time in our minds, the natural relief for persons so disgusted with the book, is to listen to and cherish objections

against its Divine authority, till they become covert, if not avowed infidels; for it is an easy and natural transition, from violent disgust against the book, to wish it was an imposition, and then to treat it as one. So injurious to Divine revelation, in the conclusion, is a rash zeal for pressing the practice of good works, in neglect of christian doctrine.

It is no less injurious to the very cause it means to serve: for the peculiar doctrines which Christ and his apostles taught, and all succeeding pastors are charged to maintain, have this honour put upon them, because the evidence of their truth is found in the necessities of our natural condition, and are most affecting to every individual as soon as he comes to the knowledge of himself, whether he hath received the improvements of education, or cannot tell one letter from another. A brief review of the principal doctrines of Christ will prove this.

What object can you place before men more likely to impress them, than an immortal spirit in a state of ruin? "Foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy," Tit. iii. 3; and on account of such depravity, become hateful even to the wise and good God. Yet the whole of this depravity is manifest in the purpose, tempers, pursuits, and pleasures of men

in all stations, and of every age, till they are "renewed in the spirit of their mind." Consequently, this black indictment, faithfully drawn up, and proved by two infallible witnesses,—scripture and matter of fact, will, as far as argument can, excite men earnestly to seek deliverance from a condition so infamous and guilty; it will work upon them, either to turn away in a rage from the faithful glass, which shows them their own features; or to humble themselves in a full confession of all their misery before God, with unfeigned desire to walk in newness of life.

Again; what argument so likely to affect the giddy and the gay, the rich and high-minded; awakening even them to serious consideration, as a whole world of condemned malefactors; condemned for breaking a law of most benevolent intention, of consummate excellence, enacted by highest authority: the penalty for which transgression is, and ought to be, extremely great, even the curse of God? The nature and end of law, in every nation under heaven, and the known condition of all capital offenders convicted by it, join with scripture doctrine, to help our dull conceptions of the consequences of our sin. In which case one, as well as another, can perceive, that due care ought to be taken to demonstrate, that it is not from slight thoughts

of sin, that God receives any of us to mercy; due care that his justice and purity should be fully manifested in the punishment of sin, lest the favour of forgiveness should be deemed a little matter, and wantonly abused. From this obvious consideration, salvation by Christ alone is calculated to strike the mind as the wisdom and power of God.

With respect, also, to the person of Christ and his office, what circumstance is there that the people cannot comprehend? When the prophet saith, "Behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you," Isa. xxxv. 4; all who are weak and fearful of heart, lest they should be lost, (whom these words address,) will clearly perceive the suitableness and the great value of the promise, and long for its accomplishment. And when the Saviour is called, "Light of the world, Prince of peace, Emmanuel," the sound is joyful, the condescension amazing, and the benefit it encourages us to expect, most welcome to every one who desires peace and communion with God.

Above all, the grand central truth of the Bible, the eternal redemption of the church, is formed from our very constitution to strike us, as soon as it is proposed and believed, above every other argument. Even an enormous offender, dying under the hands of jus-

tice, is a powerful preacher against his own crimes to a thousand spectators. His end will draw attention from young and old, rich and poor, who would sleep over every exhortation to obey the laws, without such an example of justice before their eyes. The death of an innocent man, of a martyr, is still more interesting. But a father, affected as David was for his rebellious Absalom, not only willing to give up his own life a substitute for his abandoned offspring, but actually expiring a sacrifice for them, excites the tenderest emotions the heart can feel. We should even be reproached as wanting in humanity itself, did we not ardently admire such a character. From these instances judge what must be the impression, when the Maker of all things saith, Lo, I come, (a body hast thou prepared me,) to die for the ungodly, for sinners, for enemies. When this fact is believed and realized to the mind; love, and adoration, and zeal to please such an unparalleled Benefactor spring up;—a Lawgiver, higher than the heavens, purging away sin by the sacrifice of himself, that his people might be saved, and the law receive no dishonour.*

* A very remarkable fact in the life of Lycurgus, prince of Sparta, proves what strong impressions sufferings endured for our benefit naturally make upon us. When Lycurgus attempted to bring about an equal division of the spartan lands, the very first proposal

The rich blessings, also, which are purchased by this bleeding oblation on the cross, with the godlike manner of their conveyance, are formed to win the heart. Forgiveness of sins, peace with God, free access to him as his adopted children; the pleasures of a holy life; hope abounding in the midst of trials; victory over death; a resurrection of the body to glory; the sight of God as he is, and the eternal enjoyment of him in heaven. All these blessings, offered, without money and without price, to every one that thirsteth for salvation, however deeply he may have plunged himself in guilt, are glad tidings, extorting that exclamation, "What is man that thou art mindful

met with so violent an opposition from the men of property, that a fray ensued, in which Lycurgus lost one of his eyes. The people, struck with the sight of the blood of their admired lawgiver, seized the offender, one Alcander by name, and gave him up to be punished at discretion. Lycurgus, with the greatest generosity, freely forgave him, for which Alcander instantly admired and loved him; became his warmest friend, and greatest advocate with the men of property, who opposed his designs.

If the loss of one member of the body only, in a noble contention for the welfare of the republic, wrought thus powerfully on the people, and on Alcander himself, when forgiven his offence, we are not to wonder at that saying, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," John xii. 32. It was spoken from a thorough knowledge of human nature, no less than the irreversible purpose of his own mind.

of him?" Psa. viii. 4. These things are calculated to put all the powers of the soul into motion, because they are infinitely grand, interesting, and desirable.

But should there be no spark of ingenuousness in our breast, to kindle at such an object as a compassionate, dying, crucified Redeemer, and the unsearchable riches of his grace; should nothing but fear and terror be able to awaken and alarm; what will you name equal to the second appearance of this rejected, despised, injured Lamb of God, as it was presented in vision to his beloved disciple? "I saw," he says, "a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works," Rev. xx. 11—13.

Then (in the words of a spirited writer) 'the intemperate gratifications of corrupt men, their impure indulgences, the ruin of the innocence, peace, and usefulness of those

whom they have made subservient to their pleasure, ambition, and avarice, shall be recalled to their remembrance; shall appear in all their dreadful circumstances of aggravation, and receive from the Judge the due recompence of Divine vengeance. Then neither titles of honour, possessions, family connexions, nor any advantages they can here boast, shall avail in the least to ward off the sentence of the impartial Judge, or shelter them from the stroke of that almighty arm which shall be lifted up against them. Then the eternal consequences of Divine anger shall pursue their crimes. The Redeemer himself shall pronounce them accursed. Heaven shall reject, and for ever close its gates against them. They shall be forsaken of God, shunned by his holy angels, avoided by all the wise, the religious, the recovered part of mankind, as contagion itself, and marked out as vessels of wrath, endured with much long-suffering, and fitted for destruction. Then that faith, piety, and virtue, which they wickedly despised, shall appear to be the only distinctions of mankind which God regards, and the sole qualifications for eternal happiness. Then the followers of Christ, in all the excellences of the christian life and character, shall be owned as the only genuine children of wisdom; shall obtain the approbation of heaven and earth,

and be accounted worthy, through the all-powerful merits and intercession of Christ, to obtain eternal life and glory.'

There can be no greater mistake, therefore, if we really mean to promote the practice of good works, than to admit, or but slightly mention, such subjects as these, in order to lecture upon some single duty, recommending it as amiable and excellent, or painting the conduct opposite to it as base and hurtful. These subjects, either to gain attention or rouse the soul to action, compared with the fall, the redemption, the eternal judgment, are weak as the sound of a whisper to the trump of God.

This mistake, also, is injurious to the practice of good works in another way, although it expresses so much zeal for them. The chief hinderance to a good life is pride of heart, which sets us above regarding the known dictates of any superior, and the affectionate counsel even of our best Friend; whilst it leads us extravagantly to over-rate the least degree of obedience we find ourselves inclined to pay; and renders us most of all averse to confess our deserts, and our debt to God for his mercies. From men it makes us expect much, and ready to take offence if it is not paid us to the full measure of what we imagine to be our due. Wherefore, till this inbred,

worst distemper of the mind is subdued, there can be no success in pressing the observance of duty. But in order to put men out of conceit with themselves, the most effectual way is not to prove the reasonableness, excellence, or necessity of good works, or the iniquity of this or that particular vice; which method has little effect, in comparison with a direct attack upon human pride, by strong proofs from scripture and matter of fact. So far from having any reason to think well of ourselves, every individual, till renewed in the spirit of his mind, is a despiser of the authority and excellency of God; a vile ingrate towards him; an opposer of his government; consequently, a compound of qualities so odious, that no one upon earth was ever abandoned enough to speak a word in their defence. It is all this heavy charge of guilt and depravity, brought home to the conscience, not some particular instance of disobedience, which confounds the pride, or fires the resentment, of sinners; which provokes them to contradict and blaspheme the scripture doctrine, or stops their mouth, exciting in them earnest prayer for deliverance from such a state of wickedness. Only keep out of sight the whole of our vileness, and we can easily bear reproach of conscience for being guilty in many things; but when this is proved to our conviction,

there can be no peace till we become christians altogether.

Further, by dwelling only on plain, practical subjects, we necessarily confine men's attention to particular duties, instead of laying before them the spiritual law of God and its demands; by which omission, self-complacency is flattered in those who observe the single duty we press upon them, or are free from the particular vice we condemn; and thus slaves to sin of every denomination, find in turn something to make them easy or give them pleasure. Prove the necessity of temperance and chastity, many of a vile covetous spirit will think themselves sufficiently virtuous, because they are neither drunken nor lewd. Dwell on the necessity of justice and integrity in all our dealings, many of the vain and proud, of the intemperate or debauched, will bless themselves that they are very honest men. Expose fashionable vices, those who have escaped them through mere prudence, not any sense of duty to God, will conclude their state is safe and good. Exhort proud formalists to the diligent practice of devotion, and they will still more trust in a round of religious duties, and despise others. In short, all will retain their original good opinion of themselves, because, though condemned in some respects, their neighbours are so too;

no one lives without faults, and they, as well as others, have their virtues.*

But no room is left for this false conclusion; nothing to feed vanity of mind, on account of freedom from this or that particular vice, or the practice of this or that virtue, when christian doctrines are urged to enforce good works. Since from these doctrines it is a truth indisputable, that in our first estate we are all vile and lost, all concluded under sin; and are delivered out of it (if indeed delivered) "not by works of righteousness which we have done," but by mere mercy, through the atonement and righteousness of God our Saviour; and after deliverance from it, can never say with truth, we are accepted for our own goodness. Self-complacency, therefore, the great hinderance to proficiency in obedience, is mortified by these considerations to the last hour of life, even in the midst of the most active zeal to honour God, and manifest good-will to all men.

Should it be said, Care may certainly be

* Every body has heard of him, who made no other use of the Whole Duty of Man, than to point out the faults of his neighbours, by affixing their names in the margin, opposite to the vice the author condemns. This is done much oftener in the heart, than is commonly supposed, when particular branches of duty are enlarged on, without some check upon our natural spirit of self-preference.

taken so to press obedience without partiality, and without hypocrisy, as to prevent every abuse and all self-exaltation: I answer, If christian doctrines be omitted, one capital defect must still remain, which will always prevent success; because no proof of the excellency or necessity of good works, independent of christian principles, however guarded, can give men the encouragement they need, or direct them how to obtain power to do their duty. Little, indeed, is known of our condition, by those who think we want to be told our life and practice ought to be very different from what it is. Supreme love to God, and good behaviour to every one, all allow our bounden duty: but unbelief, pride, self-love, desire of gain, preferment, and distinction; love of praise, with the strong impulse of sensual appetites; make this confession affect us very slightly, and prove an effectual obstruction in the way of our duty. Hence, the contrary spirit to that of love, either to God or man, hath ruled the human species ever since the fall, when left to themselves; not from ignorance that it is evil, but from want of a determined will to cleave to that which is good. Find out a way, therefore, to dethrone these tyrant passions, good works will follow of course. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt

enlarge my heart," Psa. cxix. 32. On the contrary, to press the necessity of moral practice, without first giving plain and full directions how to master these grand impediments to well-doing, is no better than reading our sentence of condemnation. What we all want is, power to surmount the difficulties we have to contend with, and assurance of its vouchsafement: not taken for granted, but established upon strong foundations, sufficient to remove natural distrust and painful doubts about this matter. Were not such an assurance absolutely necessary to secure the practice of good works, why are promises of aid, support, consolation, and final victory given, and repeated so often and so solemnly to the faithful? Why is there any thing more in the Bible than a clear definition of our duty, and a revelation of a future state of rewards and punishments? But no such assurance of power arises from the strongest proof of the excellence or necessity of good works. Till the christian doctrine of the success of faith in Christ, his love, the power of the Holy Ghost, and the engagements of the new covenant, are proved, explained, and applied, the rule of duty, excellent as it is, will not be found practicable by us. To the command of God, there must be added his kind exhortations and endearing promises. We must be assured,

" He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength: is nigh unto all them that call upon him, and will fulfil the desire of them that fear him," Isa. xl. 29; Psa. cxlv. 18, 19. An Advocate for sinners must be set before us in such a captivating point of view, as the apostle describes him to the church, to inspire hope that our petitions will certainly prosper. " Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Heb. iv. 14—16.

When these arguments and motives are pressed, not only is support given to the weak, and comfort to the dejected, but every worker of iniquity is self-condemned, and left absolutely without excuse, for not calling on the same Lord over all, who " is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him; for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," Rom. x. 12, 13.

Such proclamations of help and power from above, are not only necessary for all, as motives

and arguments to abound in the practice of good works, but more evidently still in their case who have been long accustomed to do evil, and made themselves tenfold more the children of hell than they were before. Persons of this black character, oftener than is commonly supposed, despair of ever being better. Their long-indulged passions, stronger than iron fetters, bind them in the house of their prison. They are fallen victims to love of liquor, or vile lewdness, though temporal ruin and death stare them in the face. Led captive, and borne down by impetuous passions, in vain withstood in their own strength, how do tradesmen lie and defraud; the poor steal and pilfer; the covetous oppress; the passionate quarrel; and men in general vex and devour one another! Out of this multitude, some are recovered: their life, their mind is changed. But transformation is always brought about in a way, which clearly proves that much more than the knowledge of our duty is necessary to make us perform it. Such converts to Christ and righteousness are first heavy laden with their sins, and so grievously feel their own inability to cast away their transgressions, that they cry unto the Lord day and night for mercy and for power. Their state is drawn to the life in those remarkable words: "When the poor

and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them," Isa. xli. 17.

From hence we may account for a very surprising fact; I mean, that some of the most profligate on earth during great part of their lives, far exceed afterwards, in the excellence of their practice and the good example they set, even many who have served the Lord from their youth up. The reason is, their helplessness and misery have been more deeply felt; their prayers for deliverance, and some suitable return for such mercy, more fervent and persevering; their salvation is astonishing to themselves, and their feeling sense of God's adorable grace, to which they owe it all, quick and permanent.

This change, evident in the most extraordinary converts through every age of the church, fully proves, that the most effectual way to promote good works, is not only or principally to show they are excellent or necessary; but, on the contrary, to fix conviction on the unbelieving and impenitent, that they are as wicked and base as the word of God affirms them to be; as much need his power to help them, and importunate prayer for it, as the scripture teaches; and may be absolutely certain, that when they implore pardon and strength,

in and through Christ, they shall be saved. The very worst of men in this way, and in no other, have been converted, made wise, and just, and good, and holy; whilst the most decent and regular, by denying their own weakness and guilt, and presuming they needed no deep humiliation for sin, or cleansing in the fountain open for it, go on till death, self-exalted, unchanged, unforgiven. In one case, we see, in the strongest light, excellent fruit from deep conviction of sinfulness and helplessness; in the other, a fair exterior, and regular deportment, prove the greatest hinderance to self-knowledge, to faith in Christ, to real prayer, and abounding in every good work. In both the truth of scripture appears, that "pride goeth before destruction;" and in the sight of God, "before honour is humility," Prov. xvi. 18; xv. 33.

When this neglect of christian doctrines, pregnant with so many evils, has been justly condemned and censured, the general reply from those who allow they are intelligible by the poor, is, that we ought in charity to take it for granted that these doctrines are known and believed; and for this reason there is no occasion to teach them constantly.

What! take it for granted, against the evidence of our senses, and daily observation! Take it for granted, when the very means of

christian instruction are so notoriously neglected, and even despised! Do the poor know and believe any of the articles of the christian creed, when, almost without exception, they plead their condition in excuse for the grossest ignorance, with no less confidence, than if God had declared he would allow the plea? Do men, engrossed in following their trade, their farms, and their merchandise, understand and believe these doctrines, without the least application to their Bible, or fervent prayer, or feeling of the infinite importance of things spiritual and unseen? Can schoolmasters, if religiously disposed themselves, do more in general than hear their scholars repeat the catechism by rote, which may be done in perfect ignorance of all it means? Or, in universities, is christian religion the science which students are called upon in any degree to regard?

Unless, therefore, the pulpit is employed constantly to supply the guilty neglect of the vast multitudes of parents, ignorant and profane in educating their children, and the deplorable defects of schools and colleges, it seems hardly possible, humanly speaking, that we should be more than nominal christians; so far from discerning the excellence and end of the faith and hope of the gospel, as not even to know what they mean; be perfectly

satisfied with ourselves if we do no harm; and think we are christians to all intents and purposes, if we are but good members of society.

Let us now sum up the several evil effects which have been proved natural consequences of dwelling on the practice of good works, in neglect of christian doctrines. It makes the most important part of the Bible appear of little use; contradicts the judgment of Christ and his apostles; and their express command to teach these sacred truths. It defeats one great end of the christian ministry, which is to expound the scripture; leads men into such unscriptural notions, as makes them first to dislike, and at last reject the Bible. It keeps out of sight the most efficacious motives to abound in good works; gratifies pride, excites to odious comparisons; and passes over in silence those beneficent proclamations of help and power from above, without which no man is sufficient to walk in obedience before God.

In answer to this charge, I am sensible, some will reply,—Not less evil, as history attests, are the consequences of insisting continually on grace, the precious promises and covenant, the righteousness and merits of Christ, and other comfortable doctrines. Have they not created in wicked men a detestable presump-

tion of being saved? Have they not been so taught, as to inspire even a contempt for good works, and make every social virtue appear a low attainment; and earnest seeking to keep the commandments, a thing derogatory to the glory of free grace, by which we are accepted in the Beloved? What can be more pernicious than these effects?

It is granted, one extreme is no less fatal than the other. It is granted, moral practice must be urged, and insisted on with all authority, in its proper place and connexion, no less than the articles of faith. Nothing but antinomian frenzy ever can lead men to be shy of allowing, and earnestly contending for this. But the important point of difference between the world and the church of Christ, lies in the means which are to be used to secure the practice of good works, and their value when performed. Pagan philosophers, mere moralists, and those who think with them, will have the fruit without the tree; good practice without christian principles, from mere resolution of mind, from approbation of virtue, and determined purpose to attain future happiness. The universal church hath always taught, that knowledge of Christ, love of his name, and the power of the Holy Ghost, are previously requisite, before we can lead a christian life; that these things must be proved, explained,

applied, as most efficacious to win over the alienated heart to delight in God, and regulate the whole man according to his will. On this foundation, the whole building of christian graces is to rise, to the comfort of the believer, the benefit of all in connexion with him, and the glory of God. The sacred oracles teach that knowledge must go before faith; conviction of impending ruin for sin, and deliverance from it, before supreme love to Christ, without which there can be no humble, universal obedience, or good works well-pleasing in the sight of God.

From these testimonies the conclusion cannot be invalidated, that the great essential doctrines which ministers are constantly to teach, must be the very same as were taught by the apostles themselves, under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of truth, when they first published the gospel to the world, and laid the foundation of the christian church; not such as moral philosophers, or those who think with them, insist on, to the great disparagement of the faith and hope of the gospel.

THE END.

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